

THE WARRIORS: THE GOLD RUSH IS JUST BEGINNING

BY LEE JENKINS P. 48

JUNE 29, 2015

SI.COM
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Sports Illustrated

MAJOR DRAMA

JORDAN SPIETH'S
BUCKET LIST

THE MASTERS
THE U.S. OPEN
THE BRITISH OPEN
THE PGA



BY ALAN SHIPNUCK
P. 34

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LINEUP

6.29.2015 | VOLUME 122 | NO. 26

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Stephen Curry

The game's sharpest shooter has plenty of reasons to smile—not least, his first ring

By Lee Jenkins

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Cover: Jordan Spieth

Photograph by Kohjiro Kinno for Sports Illustrated

Cover: Stephen Curry

Photograph by Jesse D. Garrabrant/NBAE/Getty Images

U.S. OPEN

34 | JORDAN SPIETH

After a wild win at Chambers Bay, America's 21-year-old sweetheart is halfway to a Grand Slam

By Alan Shipnuck

PHOTOGRAPH BY KOHJIRO KINNO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



Sports Illustrated

—
SI.COM

FOR JUNE 29, 2015



Honor Bound

As the midpoint of the 2015 MLB season approaches—the league's 86th All-Star Game will be held at Cincinnati's Great American Ball Park on July 14—SI.com takes a look at the [very] early favorites for American and National League MVP. Is there any reason why reigning AL MVP **Mike Trout** (27) shouldn't repeat? **Bryce Harper** is living up to expectations in Washington, but will it be enough for him to bring home the hardware? Go to **SI.com/mlb** for answers to these questions and to keep track of baseball's other potential honorees in Cliff Corcoran's weekly Awards Watch.



RISINGSTARS

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED will regularly feature multimedia stories about the most intriguing emerging athletes in the nation. To see a video of this week's Rising Star—the LPGA's **Lexi Thompson**—and the entire Rising Stars series presented by Symetra, go to **SI.com/risingstars**



SI
DIGITAL BONUS



Your Lyin' Eyes

From the SI Vault
June 25, 2001

You may think you can spot an NBA prospect a mile away, but a scout sees things you're not even looking for—

as the author soon learned
By Alexander Wolff

To read this and other stories from the **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** archive, go to **SI.com/vault**

SI.COM'S
Top Stories

1 Golden Hours

Inside the Warriors' NBA championship celebration

2 Hack-a-Astro

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including an exclusive with Astros general manager **Jeff Luhnow** on the recent hacking scandal—go to **SI.com/topstories**



3 Top Prospect?

Michigan State's Connor Cook could be the first QB taken in the 2016 draft.

4 You've Got 30 Seconds

How will the new shot clock change college hoops?

5 Texas Two-Step

Former UT football coach Mack Brown and native Texan Matthew McConaughey are best buds.



SI PRO-FILES

As successful as many athletes are on the field, some find greater success after they retire. To see videos of athletes turned business leaders, go to **SI.com/pro-files**, a series from the editors of **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED** and **FORTUNE**.

PETER JONELLE/ITALIA SPORT MEDIA/AP (TROUT); CLIFF WELCH/CON SPORTSWIRE (HARPER); DIGITAL BONUS: PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PETER GREGOIRE; BACKGROUND PHOTO BY BOB ROSATO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; JULIO CORTEZ/AP (LUHNOW); GREGORY VASIL/CAL SPORT MEDIA/AP (THOMPSON)

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1
of
3

Leading Off

Quiet, Please

■ Astonished spectators at Chambers Bay grabbed their heads in disbelief after Dustin Johnson (center) missed a four-foot putt for birdie on the U.S. Open's final hole on Sunday that would have forced a playoff. Instead, 21-year-old Jordan Spieth won his second major championship of the year while Johnson (below), 31, contemplated his fourth near miss at a Grand Slam event (page 34).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
**JORDAN
NAHOLOWA'A
MURPH**

FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
INSET: ROBERT BECK FOR
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED







+

2
3**Leading
Off**

Lightning Rod

■ Yankees DH Alex Rodriguez drilled the first pitch he saw last Friday—a 95-mph fastball from the Tigers' Justin Verlander—into the rightfield seats at Yankee Stadium, becoming the 29th player to reach 3,000 hits and only the third (with Hank Aaron and Willie Mays) to also have 600 homers. A-Rod might have reached the milestones sooner, but he sat out the 2014 season while suspended for PED use. Afterward he received a pat from teammate CC Sabathia (inset).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MIKE STOBE
GETTY IMAGES

INSET: BILL KOSTROUN/AP

The
Washington
Post

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Lite

N.L. EAST DIVISION
CHAMPIONS
2014

NATIONALS PARK

PITTSBURGH
PIRATES

5 HARRISON 2B
6 MARTE LF
22 MCCUTCHEN CF
27 KANG 3B
29 CERVELLI C
24 ALVAREZ 1B
25 POLANCO RF
10 MERCER SS

JOSE
TABATA

2015 SEASON

AVG .313 2B 0
HITS 10 3B 0
HR 0 BB 1
RBI 4 OBP .333
SB 0 SLG .313

31

P

PH



31 TABATA PH

@MLB

AVG HR RBI RUNS
.313 0 4 2

SCORING

6:24PM

PITCH SPEED

MPH

ERA

1.76 23

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
PIRATES	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NATIONALS	0	0	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	6	8	0

ABC

ABC

ABC

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57 MIL 1
54 COL 5
41 STL 7:05
34 PHI 7:10
00 MIA 7:10
28 CIN 7:10
34 NYM 7:10
61 ATL 7:10

NATIONAL LEAGUE

17 SF 7:15
77 LAD 7:15
38 SD 10:10
38 ARI 10:10

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+

33

Leading
Off

Max Effort

■ When Nationals ace Max Scherzer delivered his 102nd last Saturday—to Pirates pinch hitter Jose Tabata, he was one strike away from throwing the 24th perfect game in major league history. But after fouling it off, Tabata was struck on the elbow—did he lean in?—by Scherzer's next offering. The following batter, Josh Harrison, flied out to left, and Scherzer had his no-hitter and the Nats a 6-0 victory.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MITCHELL LAYTON
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

AMERICAN LEAGUE				37	LAA	1	2 OUTS
56	BAL	5	3 OUTS	32	DAK	4	7
62	TOR	3		22	BOS	7:10	
30	CHC	4	3 OUTS	36	KC	7:10	
36	MIN	1		30	TB	7:10	
22	TEX	2	3 OUTS	31	DET	7:15	
55	CWS	3		30	NY		

INBOX

FOR JUNE 15, 2015

Let's not get too caught up in **Johan Santana's** no-hitter against the Cardinals. As far as I am concerned, neither he nor the Mets have a no-hitter. Calling Carlos Beltran's hit fair when it was clearly foul was a terrible call and tainted Santana's accomplishment.

Dave Charles, Auburn, N.Y.



This picture of **American Pharoah**, which ran on your **LINEUP** page, should have been on the cover. Do you think the horse knew what he had just accomplished? By his smile, it sure looks that way.

Jonathan Walker, Colorado Springs

How can one photograph sum up an entire sporting event and its place in history? The grin on both **Victor Espinoza's** and **American Pharoah's** faces says it all.

Jim Wall, Graham, Wash.

Lee Jenkins's article on **Steve Kerr** reminded me of a great experience I had with Kerr almost two years ago. At the time I was 78 years old and was taking my usual weekend walk near my house when I tripped and fell, banging my head on the ground and scraping my hands so badly that they bled. Before I knew it, some guy was lifting me up to help. "You look like Steve Kerr," I said. "I am Steve Kerr, and you need to see a doctor," he responded. Soon he and another man were arranging for my transportation home. Proof positive that Kerr is a kind, considerate human being.

Donald J. Ritt, M.D., Solana Beach, Calif.



COVER

In looking at your cover, I couldn't help but wonder how many of the people pictured are going to someday wish they had a memory of actually seeing **American Pharoah** cross the finish line instead of looking at their cellphones.

Davis Chapus
Rush, N.Y.



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SCORECARD

Not only was Nationals outfielder **Bryce Harper** (*right*) pee-wee teammates with Rangers third base prospect Joey Gallo, but he also played Little League and youth baseball with Cubs third baseman **Kris Bryant**.

Russell Finelsen
Bethel Park, Pa.



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30

POINT AFTER

Nick Saban's comments on changing the rules for satellite camps to ensure parity is parody. How about the inconsistencies in the number of conference games played by certain schools?

Simon Aerbauch
Chicago

CONTACT
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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GOLD

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Edited by TRISHA BLACKMAR + JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

The Gambler

New evidence that Pete Rose bet on baseball while playing isn't shocking. What would be: hearing Rose finally tell the whole truth

BY KOSTYA KENNEDY

THE TITILLATING documents revealed by ESPN's *Outside the Lines* on Monday—29-year-old pages of a bookmaker's notebook—seemed to prove what those who have looked closely at Pete Rose already all but knew: that in addition to betting on baseball while managing the Reds, he bet on the game while playing too.

While reporting my 2014 book, *Pete Rose: An American Dilemma*, two players from the mid-1980s told me that they “absolutely” believed that Rose had bet on baseball at least occasionally while still active. In another incident, first made public in *Dilemma*, Rose's mother, LaVerne, told *Cincinnati Enquirer* reporter John Erardi that Rose had lost money betting on the Padres in

the 1984 World Series. Cincinnati's also recalled to me that Rose, while the Reds' player-manager in 1985 and '86, would go to a sports bar, Sorrento's, where he would monitor the West Coast baseball games he had money on.

All of this is circumstantial but seems damning. Now come the scrawled upon pages of Michael Bertolini, a former bet runner whose conversations and other evidence were important parts of the investigation that led to Rose's lifetime banishment from baseball in 1989. While working on *Dilemma*, I spoke at length with John Dowd, who led that investigation and who viewed the new documents for *OTL*. Dowd told the program he recognized Bertolini's handwriting. When

we spoke about Rose's 2004 book, *My Prison Without Bars*, in which, after 15 years of arrogant dismissal he admitted to all of the central findings of the investigation, Dowd said, “He pissed on me all those years, denied, denied, denied and then in his book he admits to everything. Well, not everything. He said that he didn't bet while he was a player, but he did.”

Dowd echoed those sentiments to SI on Monday. For him, as validating as it was to see the newly released Bertolini documents—which had been under court-ordered seal for 26 years until *Outside the Lines* obtained them—the content was not news.

In a statement on Monday Rose said, “Since we submitted the application [for

reinstatement to baseball] earlier this year, we committed to MLB that we would not comment on specific matters relating to reinstatement. . . . I'm eager to sit down with [commissioner Rob] Manfred to address my entire history—the good and the bad—and my long personal journey since baseball. . . . Therefore at this point, it's not appropriate to comment on any specifics.”

Fair enough, although also on Monday those near to Rose were raising questions about the authenticity of the notebook pages, pointing out that they only said “Pete,” not Rose, and questioning whether



STEPHEN DUNN/GETTY IMAGES



Dowd was a suitable expert to comment on Bertolini's penmanship. "I would be eager to get the opportunity to evaluate the evidence," said Raymond Genco, an attorney representing Rose.

For Rose's sake, here's hoping he and his team don't go there. Rose's botched defense in 1989 revolved around trying to wriggle free of guilt on technicalities rather than meeting the allegations head on. With even a modicum of sincere admission, Rose might have escaped with far less than permanent ineligibility. So although Rose has continued to deny he bet as a player—doing so as recently as April—his

best move now is to come completely clean when he meets the commissioner. Manfred, through a spokesman, declined comment on how this latest development would impact reinstatement talk.

There has never been a doubt about the serious danger that Rose brought to baseball though his chronic gambling. But there had always been three factors held up as mitigating Rose's sin: 1) There was no hard proof that he bet while a player; 2) He never bet on his own team to lose; and 3) Betting on his team did not influence his managerial decisions.

The first defense is now, apparently, passé. But despite extensive probing by Dowd, law enforcement officials, others in MLB and this reporter, nothing contradicts the last two points. Of course, with Rose one is invariably waiting for the other cleat to drop.

As J.D. Friedland, who runs Pete's autographing business in Las Vegas, observed to me in 2013, "The way that Pete has changed his story over time bothers some people. For a long time he said he didn't bet on baseball at all. So, what is he not saying now?"

Perhaps Manfred will find out, if and when he and Rose meet. Perhaps Rose will finally bare all. But if past is prologue, kids, don't bet on it. □



GO FIGURE

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AMOUNT SPURS FORWARD **TIM DUNCAN** SAYS HE LOST TO FINANCIAL ADVISER CHARLES BANKS, WHO IS ALLEGED TO HAVE FORGED THE FUTURE HALL OF FAME'S SIGNATURE NUMEROUS TIMES.



Final score of an Estonian Cup competition soccer match in which FC Infonet, a first-division team, beat Virtus Jalgpalliklubi, from a town of just 500 people. Trevor Elhi had 10 goals for FC Infonet.

132

Years since the Phillies had last completed a winless road trip of at least eight games before they went 0-8 from June 8 to June 16. Philadelphia lost the final game of that road swing 19-3 in Baltimore.



8,000

Estimated number of baseballs caught at MLB stadiums by fan **Zack Hamble**, who snagged the home run Yankees DH Alex Rodriguez smashed for his 3,000th career hit last Friday in New York. Hamble told *SI Now* he is open to Rodriguez acquiring the ball.

Big Men, Big Contracts

Frontcourt players dominate the NBA's free-agent list this summer. Where they sign will have a big impact on the league

BY CHRIS MANNIX

MARC GASOL, C, *Grizzlies*

The crown jewel of this free-agent crop, Gasol, 30, is a dominant defender who scored a career-high 17.4 points per game last season. He's also a polished passer. It will take a lot to extract him from Memphis, his home since 2001.

LAMARCUS ALDRIDGE, PF, *Trail Blazers*

The 29-year-old has been a consistent 20-point, 10-rebound player over the last five years. In 2014–15 he extended his range beyond the three-point line (35.2%) for the first time in his career.

KEVIN LOVE, PF, *Cavaliers*

(*Early Termination Option*) GM David Griffin says he expects Love to opt out. That most likely means re-signing him to a five-year contract worth more than \$120 million. But does Love want to stay in Cleveland?

JIMMY BUTLER, SG, *Bulls*

(*Restricted Free Agent*) He passed on a four-year, \$44 million extension last summer and put up numbers (20.0 points per game, 5.8 rebounds) that, when paired with his elite defense, make him a max-level player. At 25, Butler is reportedly seeking a short-term deal that will position him to cash in on the higher salary cap in 2016.



GORAN DRAGIC, SG, *Heat*

A midseason acquisition, Dragic, 29, averaged 16.6 points and 5.3 assists (up from 16.2 and 4.1 with the Suns). As Miami transitions from the Dwyane Wade era, re-signing Dragic is critical.

DEANDRE JORDAN, C, *Clippers*

He led the league in rebounding (15.0) and shooting (71.0%) and was All-Defensive first team. Though limited offensively—and putrid from the line—Jordan is a lock for a max contract, and the capped-out Clippers will give him one.

DRAYMOND GREEN, PF, *Warriors*

(*RFA*) A versatile defender, Green can bang in the post (ask Zach Randolph) and extend to the perimeter (ditto, Josh Smith). Last season he

emerged as a reliable scorer (11.7 points) and playmaker (3.7 assists), pushing his price into max territory.

GREG MONROE, PF, *Pistons*

Andre Drummond's presence in Detroit makes Monroe, 25, the likeliest high-profile player to relocate. A 15-point, 10-rebound player over the last four seasons, he improved his foul shooting to a career-best 75.0% in '14–15.

PAUL MILLSAP, PF, *Hawks*

The two-year, \$19 million deal he signed in '13 was a bargain for Atlanta—Millsap earned back-to-back All-Star nods. Though undersized (6' 8"), he is a strong rebounder and capable defender.

BROOK LOPEZ, C, *Nets*

(*ETO*) He bounced back from a right-foot injury in '13–14 with 17.2 points and 7.4 boards in 72 games, but he will never be a bruiser down low. Is Lopez's foot—surgically repaired four times—no longer a concern?

RAJON RONDO, PG, *Mavericks*

His stock plummeted when a rough four-month stint in Dallas ended with his banishment from the team. Many execs wonder if Rondo, two years removed from right-ACL surgery, can ever be the player he was in Boston.

Almost Perfect

Four times this century a pitcher has lost his bid for a perfect game with one out to go. Here they are, in order of most to least heartbreaking.



Armando Galarraga
Tigers
June 2, 2010

Ump Jim Joyce calls Indians' Jason Donald safe at first base after a ground ball. Joyce later admits he blew the call.



Mike Mussina
Yankees
Sept. 2, 2001

One strike away, Mussina gives up a single to the Red Sox' Carl Everett on a 1-and-2 pitch, settles for a one-hit shutout.



Max Scherzer
Nationals
June 20, 2015

Pirates' Jose Tabata leans in to a 2-and-2 pitch and gets hit. Scherzer recovers to complete the no-hitter.



Yu Darvish
Rangers
April 2, 2013

Astros' Marwin Gonzalez lines a clean, first-pitch single, knocking Darvish from the game.



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Playing Hurt

THE NHL PLAYOFFS are a nine-week battle of attrition. Playing with pain is a given, but the extent to which hockey's bearded tough guys will go is hard to appreciate without adding up the carnage and the games missed after the fact. Behold this schematic of who endured what and for how long.

SHOULDERS

Ducks C Nate Thompson
two tears in labrum

Missed games: 4 of 16

Rangers D Keith Yandle
sprained shoulder

Missed games: 0 of 17

Wild RW Chris Stewart
separated shoulder

Missed games: 2 of 2

TORSO

Canadiens D Nathan Beaulieu
fractured sternum

Missed games: 7 of 9

Flames LW Micheal Ferland
torn oblique

Missed games: 2 of 7

Lightning G Ben Bishop
torn groin

Missed games: 1 of 4

Ducks C Ryan Getzlaf
sports hernia

Missed games: 0 of 16

KNEE

Predators D Shea Weber
dislocated kneecap

Missed games: 4 of 4

Rangers D Dan Girardi
Grade 1 MCL sprain

Missed games: 0 of 3

HEAD

Rangers RW Mats Zuccarello
fractured skull, brain contusion

Missed games: 14 of 14

ARM & HAND

Blackhawks D Johnny Oduya
elbow tear

Missed games: 0 of 4

Lightning C Tyler Johnson
broken wrist

Missed games: 0 of 6

Senators RW Mark Stone
fractured wrist

Missed games: 0 of 5

Jets D Jacob Trouba
broken bone in hand

Missed games: 0 of 2

Wild LW Jason Zucker
broken bone in thumb

Missed games: 0 of 8

ANKLE & FOOT

Penguins C Evgeni Malkin
sprained ankle

Missed games: 0 of 5

Rangers D Marc Staal
hairline fracture in ankle

Missed games: 0 of 19

Rangers D Ryan McDonagh
fractured bone in foot

Missed games: 0 of 3

Red Wings D Jonathan Ericsson
broken big toe

Missed games: 0 of 7

THEY SAID IT

"Our athletic program has not reached the point where we require the numbing effects of alcohol."

John Sharp,

Texas AGM chancellor, responding to news that Texas will serve beer at football games.



Wes Welker

His horse, Undrafted, won the Diamond Jubilee Stakes at Royal Ascot last Saturday. Based on the win, the free-agent WR should buy another pony. He can name it Unsigned.



The Royals

The eight players holding spots on the All-Star team will cost the franchise \$1.25 million in bonuses. Now their fans will have to stuff donation boxes.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Red Sox third baseman **Pablo Sandoval** was benched for one game after he was found liking photos on Instagram while using the bathroom during a loss to the Braves on June 17.



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2015

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EXPERT ANALYSIS
Of Every
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FILED IN: 11/10/14 DISPLAY UNTIL 11/22/14



GRONK
Back on top at
tight end



PETERSON
Prediction: a
strong return



GORDON
Surefire rookie
of the year



BRYANT
Definitely
a catch



MO
Fo



THE COMEBACK

Fast Track

Angels fireballer Garrett Richards had finally gotten comfortable on the mound when injury struck. Here's how he regained his groove

BY BEN REITER

WITH THE 25TH pick in the 2009 draft, the Angels selected an outfielder from Millville (N.J.) Senior High. Seventeen slots later they chose a pitcher out of Oklahoma. The outfielder's name was Mike Trout. The pitcher's name was Garrett Richards.

Although Trout was just 17 when the two met in 2009, and Richards was 21, they became fast friends. They began living together in '10 while playing Class A ball in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and five years later, after climbing up the organization in tandem—from Rancho Cucamonga (Calif.) to Little Rock to Salt Lake City and then to Anaheim—they still do. "Every year their girlfriends are waiting for them to go, Well, we're not going to live together this year," says Richards's mother, Terri. "It'll happen one day."

Trout is, by all accounts, the less fastidious of the pair. "He's still a kid, and he didn't go to college," Richards says. "I've been picking up after him for five years now." Their cohabitation has otherwise been harmonious, thanks to a shared love of grilling every night after games, no matter the hour ("Fire it up, for sure," says Trout), and of competition. "We're always trying to beat each other," says Richards, now 27. "He pushes me to be better."

Richards's





ANDY MARLIN/JSA TODAY SPORTS

path to major league success was far rockier than his housemate's. Like Trout, the 2014 American League MVP, Richards was blessed, in his case with a right arm that could throw a baseball more than 95 mph by the time he was a senior at Edmond (Okla.) Memorial High. "That strength in the arm comes from his dad, Tommy, who is in construction," says Terri. "Maybe it's in the chromosomes."

For most of his life, though, Richards couldn't effectively harness his gift. "The only thing that really kept my baseball career going was the fact that I could just *throw*," Richards says. "I was never the best player on any of my teams growing up. Even the paper in Edmond was never writing about me."

In his three years with the Sooners, Richards never had an ERA lower than 6.00, in part because he walked more than one batter every two innings. He thought about quitting as a sophomore, perhaps to go to culinary school. He always thought too much, especially on the mound. "There's a lot of guys that are like, no brains, no headache," says Ryan Heil, who was Richards's pitching coach in the Alaska Baseball League, where he played for the Mat-Su Miners after his sophomore year and rediscovered his love of baseball. "They're not thoughtful, so they don't feel the pressure. He's not like that."

Even as he advanced through the minors, Richards's mind would race during every outing as he tried to get command

of not only the speed of his pitches but also their biting movement. His right pointer finger extends just to his middle finger's second knuckle, and that extra-long digit, he believes, gives his pitches unusual and unpredictable spin. "I haven't been able to figure out why my ball cuts the way it does," he says.

After parts of three major league seasons, he was still fighting himself on the mound, as evidenced by an 11-13 record and a pedestrian 4.42 ERA. The Angels had used him as both a starter and a reliever, but before the start of 2014, pitching coach Mike Butcher told him to prepare to make 33 starts. Richards internalized the club's confidence in him. "He was always one of those guys that just had great stuff," says Trout. "Last year he figured out every pitch."

As an entrenched starter, Richards stopped overthinking and simply let the ball go. He delivered his four-seam fastball, with its natural cut, at an average of more than 96 mph, which was nearly 2 mph harder

"He was always one of those guys that just had great stuff," says Trout.

"Last year he figured out every pitch."

than he'd thrown it the year before and also the hardest of any starter in the league. His two-seamer was almost as fast and even more wicked. "Most guys don't throw sliders at 88 miles an hour that break as much as his fastball does," says Butcher. He also baffled hitters with a biting slider and, once in a while, a slow curve. By Aug. 20, the day on which he was due to make his first start at Fenway Park, Richards had a record of 13-4 and an ERA of 2.53, third best in the AL.

As more than 35,000 fans filed into the old ballpark, Richards walked out to the bullpen with Butcher and allowed himself, for the first time all season, to reflect on what he had achieved. "Man, look what we get to do every day for a living," he said. "Isn't it amazing?"

Less than an hour later, in the bottom of the second inning, Richards lay crumpled on the ground in the dirt next to first base. He had raced to cover the bag to complete a potential double play, but he had taken an awkward step, and now, between screams, he was telling first baseman Albert Pujols, who was kneeling over him and holding his hand, that he couldn't feel his left leg. Even before a trainer sheared away Richards's pants, Pujols could see that the pitcher's kneecap had gruesomely retracted halfway up his quad. "I was trying to calm him down before the trainer got there," Pujols recalls, "but I knew he was done."

Richards had ruptured his patellar tendon, the

inch-and-a-half-wide band of tissue that connects the kneecap to the tibia. His season was over.

RICHARDS allowed himself a few hours to process the pain he was experiencing and what it signified. Later that night, though, as his teammates—including Pujols and Trout—filed into his hotel room to check in on him, he had already vowed that his first taste of success would not be his last. “It was kind of instant rehab mode,” he says. “Started getting myself mentally prepared for what I was about to embark on.”

The Aug. 22 surgery, which left him with a six-inch vertical scar on the center of his left knee, was the easy part. During a 90-minute procedure, Richards’s surgeons drilled three holes in his kneecap, manually pulled it back down to its proper position and used wire to reattach it to the ruptured tendon.

After eight weeks of healing, Richards moved to Tempe, Ariz., to begin the grueling rehabilitation process under the supervision of Keith Kocher. The physical therapist has worked with injured major leaguers for a quarter century—his first Tommy John patient was John Farrell, who was managing the Red Sox on the night Richards fell to the Fenway dirt—but Richards’s injury was rare for a baseball player, and rarer still for a pitcher.

Kocher’s goals for Richards were to restore



UNFAIR GAME

When Richards hurt his left knee covering first last August, a dream season came to a painful end.

his knee’s range of motion, rebuild his atrophied quadriceps and have him throw off the mound by spring training, which was three months away. “Some guys take a year,” Kocher says. “But Garrett didn’t come in with any woes—Gosh, why me? It was always, What’s next?”

At first Richards was unable to bend his knee much past 90 degrees, so Kocher focused on that. “I don’t ever want to have to count to 20 ever again,” says Richards, of the typical length of Kocher’s exercises. “You just count to 20 all day long.” As the weeks wore on, Richards began working in a pool, and then on a dewweighted treadmill, which supported most of his body to decrease the impact on his knee. The real test, though, came just before the Angels began spring training in Tempe. On Feb. 16, Richards threw off the mound for

the first time. “He was apprehensive at first, and this [injury] is not something that has been tested with a pitcher a lot,” says Kocher. “Is he going to be able to hold up? We did some predrills to let him know he was going to be O.K.”

He was O.K., even if no body part, after it has been injured and repaired, is ever identical to what it was before. “Your tissue’s never the same,” says Kocher. “But your performance can return.”

RICHARDS SPENT his spring throwing in the bullpen and in simulated games of steadily increasing intensity, but he was not ready for the real thing until April 19. In his first start, against

the Astros, he lasted five innings and allowed three earned runs. By his next one, against the Rangers in Anaheim, he seemed back to his dominating self: He gave up just two earned runs on three hits in seven innings and got the win.

The next day the visiting clubhouse attendant at Angel Stadium presented Richards with a sealed envelope. Inside was an invoice, signed by veteran Texas slugger Adrian Beltre, billing Richards for the three bats that Richards’s pitches had broken the previous evening. “He charged me \$100 each,” says Richards. “No checks, cash only.” Did Richards pay? “No!” he says. “That guy’s making way more money than me.”

Beltre, indeed, will earn \$16 million this season, to Richards’s \$3.2 million. Anyway, the invoice was just a joke between frequent rivals—Beltre’s way of welcoming Richards back and his acknowledgement of what the pitcher had been through over the previous eight months. At week’s end Richards was 7–5 with an ERA of 3.66, more than a run higher than last year’s. Even so, it took him 26 years to reach that standard, and neither he nor his housemate will permit one bad step to stop him from getting there again.

“To see him work hard, get back to where he is now, it’s pretty awesome,” says Trout. “I’m glad I’m in the outfield just watching behind him, and not in the box.” □

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For more on how Richards recovered, including video of the special equipment he used and an interview with Trout, go to SI.com/thecomeback

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TRAINING WITH

+

Brandin Cooks

A combine speed champ looks to get faster

AT THE 2014 NFL combine, Brandin Cooks ran the fastest time in the 40-yard dash (4.33 seconds), leading the Saints to select the wide receiver from Oregon State with the 20th pick in the draft. Once the season started, Cooks had no problem keeping pace with the expectations created by his combine breakout. Through 10 games he had seven touchdowns and 550 yards on 53 receptions. But in that 10th game, a 27–10 loss to the Bengals, Cooks broke his right thumb, ending his season. As he sat out those final weeks, he hatched a plan for 2015: Get even faster.

“My type of game is being explosive and fast,” says Cooks, and more of the same could only help. A native of Stockton, Calif., he spent the off-season training in San Diego. The work included sled pushes, sled pulls, tire flips, box jumps and squats. “Anything that has to do with using the full body to explode,” Cooks says.



He supplemented those common speed-building exercises with a personal favorite. “I usually go to the beach just to get a different surface to plant on,” says Cooks. “That’s my little getaway workout that I do a couple of times a week to take impact off the body but at the same time get a good run in.”

The low-stress alternative is important because, at 5' 10" and 189 pounds, the undersized Cooks is particularly focused on longevity and recovery. He regularly takes days off and spends time in a hyperbaric chamber, a device that proponents say allows the blood to carry more oxygen, which can speed recovery. “I usually get in there every night,” says Cooks. “After practice or after a game, I just sleep in there for a couple of hours to rejuvenate the body.”

Cooks’s efforts seem to be paying off. During the Saints’ June 16–18 minicamp *The Times-Picayune* called Cooks “the best player not named Brees,” referring to the Saints’ QB. With two of last season’s biggest offensive weapons—tight end Jimmy Graham and receiver Kenny Stills—now playing elsewhere, Cooks will have plenty of opportunities to show the world how fast he can go. —Daniel Friedman

EDGE

Acceleration Runs

Warm up with a light jog. Then, on a track or grass, walk a series of 200-meter distances, focusing on mechanics and slowly increasing speed until reaching a sprint.

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/trainingwith



1. To start, pop one thigh forward as hard and fast as possible.



2. Keep the opposite foot as low to the ground as possible as it extends back.



3. Push aggressively off the first foot and pop the other thigh forward. Repeat until you feel comfortable, then increase intensity.



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UPDATE

Fast Start

■ **Eleven seconds** is the benchmark that separates the women from the girls in the 100 meters. Last Saturday, at the Brooks PR Invitational in Seattle, 16-year-old Candace Hill joined the elite group with a scorching win in 10.98 seconds, becoming the first U.S. high school girl to break the 11-second barrier, smashing the American junior and world youth records. Candace, who finished her sophomore year at Rockdale County High in Conyers, Ga., last month, is a five-time national champion, and already held Georgia state records in the 100- and 200-meter dash. Her record-setting race would have earned third place at this year's NCAA championships and tied for 10th best in the world this season. —A.F.

**Gary Trent Jr.** | *Apple Valley, Minn.* | *Basketball*

Gary, a 6' 5" junior guard at Apple Valley High, scored 19 points, all in the second half, in a 77-60 come-from-behind win over Canada to lead the U.S. 16-and-under team to the FIBA Americas gold medal. He was named tournament MVP. The son of a former NBA forward, he led Apple Valley to the 4A title with 15 points in a 64-61 win over Champlin Park.

**Christina Aragon** | *Billings, Mont.* | *Track and Field*

Christina, a Billings Senior High junior, won the 800 meters at the Brooks PR Invitational in a national-season-best 2:04. A week earlier she won the girls' Dream Mile in 4:37.91 at the Adidas Grand Prix in New York City, the third-fastest scholastic time in U.S. history and a meet record. At the Montana 2A meet she set a state mark in the 1,600 with a 4:46.34.

**Luca Cupido** | *Newport Beach, Calif.* | *Water Polo*

Cupido, an attacker and rising sophomore at Cal, netted two last-minute game-winners to help the U.S. sweep Serbia in a four-game exhibition series. The U.S. hadn't beaten Serbia since the 2008 Olympics. He scored with two seconds left in Lake Forest, Calif., for an 11-10 victory; two days later in Chicago, Cupido sealed a 14-13 win with a buzzer beater.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK

**Sammi Hampton** | *Vancouver, Wash.* | *Tennis*

Sammi, a Skyview High senior, claimed her fourth consecutive 4A title when Vivian Glzman of Newport High withdrew due to injury, capping her fourth straight undefeated season. In 92 career matches Sammi dropped only two sets. She is ranked 47th in the U.S. among girls 18 and under and tops in the Pacific Northwest. Sammi will play at Arizona State.

**Mike Murphy** | *Atkinson, N.H.* | *Volleyball*

Mike, a 6' 3" senior right side hitter and captain at Timberlane Regional High in Plaistow, had 14 kills and four blocks to lead the Owls to a 3-1 upset of 10-time defending champion Salem High for the Division 1 title. He scored the clinching point on a block. Mike, who averaged 10.5 kills this season, will play for New Hampshire's club team.

**Chloe Akin-Otiko** | *Bellevue, Neb.* | *Track and Field*

Chloe, a junior at Class A Bellevue High, became the second girl in Nebraska history to win four all-class gold medals at the state meet. [Each athlete can enter only four events.] She broke her own state record in the 100 meters [11.69 seconds], won the 200 [24.56] and 400 [56.77], and anchored the 4 x 100 relay to an all-class-best 48.78.

Nominate Now ▼



JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: *Are there people who don't realize that you were a pro wrestler before you began acting?*

DWAYNE JOHNSON: There's a large group of people who not only don't realize that I wrestled but also—to an even larger degree—that I played football down at the U [Miami].

DP: *Who was the best player on your Miami team?*

DJ: That's hard. I came in at a very special time. We were Dennis Erickson's first class [1989]. By the time I came, there were players who had won [the national championship] with Jimmy Johnson—Jessie Armstead, Gino Torretta, Micheal Barrow, Darryl Williams. The cupboard was full. But probably best overall player I played with . . . it's between Ray Lewis and Warren Sapp.

DP: *Who talked more, Lewis or Sapp?*

DJ: It was probably equal. My first run-in with Sapp, we brought him in as a tight end. During spring ball the coaches decided to move him to defensive tackle. Russell Maryland had just left the program, and I was getting ready to compete for that position. Warren came in, looked at me and said, "I gotta tell you, man, I'm taking your spot." I said, "You ain't taking my spot!" And then about six months later he took my spot.



DWAYNE JOHNSON

THE ROCK, STAR

With his smash hit *San Andreas* in theaters, the 43-year-old launches the HBO series *Ballers*, in which he plays a financial adviser to athletes.

DP: *Who [of the two] would have been the better WWE performer?*

DJ: Both of them have big personalities. WWE was at its height during what we now call the Attitude Era, and we were recruiting [Lewis and Sapp] for a big WrestleMania match [against Stone Cold Steve Austin and the Undertaker]. We came close [to making it happen]. Both those guys would have done great in the ring.

DP: *What's shadier, sports or Hollywood?*

DJ: Oh, by far, Hollywood. Anytime that there's an extraordinary amount of money, there's the good and the bad. My history with sports really prepared me for Hollywood. At the end of the day there's still discipline and hard work. If you can apply that in Hollywood, it really helps.

DP: *Did you ever have a wardrobe malfunction while wrestling?*

DJ: I did early [in my career]. When I first got to the WWE, I had no money. Everything was pieced together; I had to borrow trunks. There was a wrestler named King Tonga who was affectionately known as Uncle Tonga. I had to borrow trunks from him. He was a massive man. His trunks were a lot bigger than my waist at that time. There was a little bit of a malfunction. Things had a tendency to pop out. You gotta just go with the flow and pop things back in. □

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Even at 53, former NFL running

back **Herschel Walker** still trains in MMA and hopes to continue fighting. "I don't do stuff for money," Walker said. "I do it to beat people up." . . .



Indians skipper **Terry Francona**

reflected on managing Michael Jordan in the minors with the Double A Birmingham Barons in 1994. "The one thing I found out with MJ is that when you messed with him, he liked it," Francona told me. "The more you treated him like a normal person, the more he loved it. I messed with him all



the time. I still do." . . . **Paul Lukas**, editor of

uni-watch.com, a website that tracks sports uniforms, isn't a fan of the Clippers' new clothes. "It looks like a makeover for the sake of a makeover," Lukas said. "It certainly doesn't say Clippers. It may spell out the word *Clippers*, but it doesn't feel like a well-integrated brand."



My first catch wasn't a football.

It was a bullhead. Across the road from the house I grew up in, there was a little bend in the creek where the water ran deep. This was my favorite spot to fish. My brother and I would spend our summer days there, pulling fish out by the dozens. What can I say? I guess I'm just good at catching things.



Jordy Nelson



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TROPHY FISHING

Pitcher Jacob deGrom scored big on the field last season but is still waiting for an award on the water.

IN HIS SHORT CAREER, Jacob deGrom has already reeled in some impressive baseball hardware. The New York Mets pitcher won the National League Rookie of the Year award last season, but he was not always so precocious in competition. As a high schooler, deGrom loved to take part in bass fishing tournaments in his native central Florida, with considerably less success.

"I never won any of them," he admits.

DeGrom grew up near DeLand, Fla., a city about 20 miles inland from Daytona Beach that is surrounded by great fishing locales. He spent many of his summers competing in bass tournaments, and in one such event he found himself floating on a lake near a man he was working for to earn some extra cash.

"It was about time to leave," deGrom recounts. "I get a fish on, and I'm reeling it in over the top of some lily pads. I lifted up the fish, and to mess around with my boss, I yelled at him, 'Hey, look at this fish!'"

"And I dropped it. I almost dropped it in the water!"

Before any further disaster, deGrom rushed in for the weigh-in, feeling confident with a 5½-pound bass. His boss stayed out a few minutes longer and came back to shore just in time to beat the clock—with a six-pounder, of course. DeGrom would have to wait for his rookie season in the majors to score a trophy like that.

DeGrom started fishing early, wading out behind his dad in nearby lakes—behind, and never in front, thanks to one of Florida's best-known residents.

"My friends and I were scared to go in front of our dads," says deGrom. "We didn't want to get into the deep water because we were scared of alligators."

The baseball season leaves little time for angling, so nowadays deGrom gets his fishing fix during spring training in Port St. Lucie, Fla. He's found a few teammates who accompany him to nearby lakes or ponds and a team

chaplain who lends him a boat for some saltwater fishing. DeGrom is a relative novice on the ocean, and this spring his haul paled in comparison to that of his new fishing partner: his wife, Stacey.

"She was actually out-fishing us in the salt water," he says. "She was getting all the sheepshead. She got a big speckled trout. The only thing I caught was a snapper."

The two married this past off-season, which means deGrom now has a permanent fishing buddy. DeGrom doesn't enjoy fishing solo, so in addition to his wife, he relishes having Mets teammates who love to fish just as much as he does.

"That's what makes it enjoyable," he says. "I go out there and do something like that off the field, and that's where friendships start."

—Evan Scott Schwartz



GREAT CATCH:
DeGrom and his
wife Stacey both
grew up fishing in
Florida.





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*In a study of contrasts, Jordan Spieth moved halfway to
the U.S. Open, while Dustin Johnson was left sea*

TWO D TWO TO F

BY ALAN

Photo
Kohji
For Sport



*the Grand Slam by surviving an epic back-nine battle at
rching after another stunning collapse in a major*

DOWN. HISTORY

SHIPNUCK

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ro Kinno
s Illustrated

AT HOME ON THE LINKS

In what he
acknowledged
should be a good
tune-up for the
British Open, Spieth
expertly negotiated
his way around
Chambers Bay.



Early on Sunday evening, after the lesser characters had finally exited the stage, the 115th U.S. Open became a two-man drama that doubled neatly as a morality play. Jordan Spieth, America's sweetheart, came to the 72nd hole having already won and lost the Open on the preceding two greens, or so it seemed. The Masters champ was chasing history in his own earnest way. In the final group behind him was bad boy Dustin Johnson, though because this is golf he's not *that* bad. But things have always come a little too easily for Johnson—girls, golf, riches—and now he found himself in the hunt on the last nine of our national championship, which serves as a kind of MRI of the soul. Johnson had arrived at the 10th tee with a two-shot lead, thanks to a front nine of metronomic ball striking, but he shrank from the immensity of the opportunity, bogeying three of the next four holes to tumble out of the lead.

Spieth came to the 18th tee with his caddie, Michael Greller, in his ear, “shoving positive thoughts into my head” as the 21-year-old Spieth put it. He needed them. He had been tied for the lead on the 16th hole, when playing partner Branden Grace, an unsung South African, blew his tee shot in the vicinity of the railroad tracks along Puget Sound en route to a double bogey. Spieth poured in a 27-foot birdie putt with four feet of break, and just like that the lead was three. The ruthlessness of the putt, and the lusty celebration that followed, evoked Tiger Woods in his prime. “That was about as animated as I’ve been since maybe throwing a tantrum when I was 13 on the course,” Spieth said. “I thought that was the one.” But on the par-3 17th he made what could have been a reputation-altering double bogey, three-putting after a poor tee shot to fall back to four under.

The tee box of the 601-yard, par-5 18th hole was chaotic and claustrophobic. Spieth was surrounded by photographers with itchy trigger fingers, harried USGA officials aggressively whispering into walkie-talkies, and cops with mirrored sunglasses trying to contain the huge crowds that had been whipped into a frenzy by an epic back nine. As Spieth stood on the tee, assessing his options, he was enveloped by roars. Johnson had just stuffed his tee shot on 17, setting up the birdie that would tie him for the lead. Up ahead Louis Oosthuizen was making birdie to reach four under. That capped a back nine for the ages (29), but this story was never going to be about Oosthuizen.

THAT SPIETH'S fate would be decided on the 18th hole was proof that the golf gods have a sense of humor. Chambers Bay, in University Place, Wash., is a neo-links on a grand scale, with huge, heaving greens and expansive teeing areas that allow for a wide variety in the setup. On Friday, the 18th had been shortened to a 514-yard par-4, and en route to making a double bogey, the ordinarily genteel Spieth was caught by TV mikes calling it “the dumbest hole I’ve ever played in my life,” owing to an extremely tight landing area. He doubled down on the criticism when talking to reporters after his round. Did Spieth’s outcry persuade the USGA leadership to play the hole as a par-5 on Sunday, even though there is an institutional bias toward a tough par-4 as a finishing hole? Maybe, maybe not, but it was the first taste of the political capital that comes with being the game’s best player. (Sorry, Rory.)

Spieth smashed his drive on 18, and it looked for all the world to be headed into the bunker from which he made his double bogey. But the ball

TROUBLING

Spieth was in control until a double bogey at the 17th, and even after a birdie at the last he thought he had thrown it away.



took a soft bounce on the burned-out fairways and stopped three paces short of the sand, on a gentle upslope that would help him launch his approach shot from 279 yards. The perfect lie was one of the lucky little breaks on which a career can hinge. “I couldn’t have walked up there and placed the ball any better,” Spieth said. “That slope allowed me to hit 3-wood and get it in the air. That was absolutely huge.” His cut shot was flirting with a greenside bunker until, in his estimation, a puff of wind at the last moment blew the ball onto the right edge of the green, and from there it rode a ridge to within 15 feet of the hole. The shot was an instant classic. It is testament to how many big putts Spieth has already made in his career that it rated as a surprise he didn’t bury the eagle try. Still, the tap-in birdie gave him back the solo lead at five under.

Johnson had already shoved a 353-yard drive down the throat of the fairway, and then he pured a 5-iron to 13 feet, setting up a slippery downhill slider for eagle to win. Sequestered in the scoring area, Spieth agonized over having left the tournament in someone else’s hands.



6

Players who have won the first two legs of the Grand Slam. Only Ben Hogan, in 1953, went on to win the British.

7

Leads owned or shared by Spieth in the eight rounds at the first two majors of 2015, a feat that had never been accomplished.

126

Putts by Spieth at Chambers Bay, the most by a U.S. Open champ since the stat was first tracked in 1980.

"How did I possibly let this happen?" he asked Greller. But watching as other players beat themselves is right out of the Woods playbook, which he borrowed from Jack Nicklaus, a student of Bobby Jones, who once said, "Nobody wins the Open. Everyone else just loses it."

As Johnson surveyed his putt, his glamorous band of supporters gathered on the hill above the 18th green: his fiancée, Paulina Gretzky, who was clutching their five-month-old baby boy, Tatum; Paulina's famous dad, Wayne, and his wife, Janet; and Sam Maddox, the girlfriend to Johnson's caddie/brother Austin. Like Paulina, Maddox was turned out in tight pants, a tight top and shoes not fit for a golf course, let alone the hilly terrain of Chambers Bay.

Johnson's putt raised a series of questions: Does winning make you a better person? Can absolution be found on a golf course? If a putting surface is yellow and brown, can you still call it a green? He ran the eagle attempt four feet past. In the blink of an eye, Johnson went from a chance at everlasting glory to needing to make a knee-knocker just to force an 18-hole Monday playoff. Longtime Tour player Scott McCarron,

THE ROAD to the Open began the week after the Masters, at Hilton Head. Spieth had flown from Augusta to New York City for a whirlwind media tour, and he was exhausted and overwhelmed as he arrived back in South Carolina on the eve of the RBC Heritage. It showed during a first-round 74. The next day Spieth shot 62, and he kept grinding en route to an 11th-place finish that was a monument to his resolve and professionalism. "One of the more impressive things I've seen him do," says Greller.

Throughout the spring the U.S. Open was Spieth's sole focus. He felt he had a secret weapon in Greller, who makes his home in the Tacoma area and was married at Chambers Bay two years ago. In his previous life as a middle school math and science teacher, Greller had moonlighted as a caddie at Chambers, and Spieth came to believe his looper's knowledge would be a decisive advantage on a track few of the pros had seen. Said Greller on Saturday night, "It's been five years, and the course has changed so much I honestly don't know these greens any better than, say, Colonial. But if Jordan believes we have an advantage, that's all that matters." Spieth repeatedly called in his caddie to consult on putts, though in Greller's telling he was mostly just confirming for his boss what a great read he had made. "He likes me to pump him up," Greller says.

The bumpy putting surfaces at Chambers Bay provoked howls of protest from many of the pros, but Spieth wouldn't get sucked into the controversy. "Well, we got over it," he said on Sunday night. "Someone had to hold the trophy. There's noise around every golf tournament about a pin position here or the greens are this or the layout is that. The quicker you realize that and don't worry about it, the easier it is just to move on with your game, and that's what we try to do." In fact, he credited his opening two-under-par 68 to his putting,

who was working as an on-course reporter for Fox, was now off-duty, so as he stood next to the green he whispered his analysis to an audience of one: "He's going to miss left. He's been coming up and out of his putts all day and missing right, and this time he's going to overcorrect." And so Johnson did, touching off a delirious celebration among the very tight Spieth clan, salt-of-the-earth Texans who had spent the agonizing wait trying to stay out of view of the TV cameras.

Now the oldest of the three Spieth kids gets to chase the third leg of the Grand Slam at next month's British Open, at the Old Course, which has long been a proving ground for golfing genius. Spieth is the youngest U.S. Open champ since the great Jones in 1923, and the first player to claim the national championship with a 72nd hole birdie since Jones in '26. An hour after it was over Spieth was still trying to make sense of the gut-wrenching finish. "I'm still in shock," he said. "You only get a few moments in your life like this. And to have two in one year, that's hard to wrap my head around."

saying it probably should have been a 73. The scary thing about Spieth's run is that at the Masters and the Open he didn't have his best ball-striking weeks, but he eked out the lowest possible scores.

Away from the course Spieth and his family have found a winning formula to deal with his cresting stardom. "We keep it as normal as possible," says Spieth's father, Shawn, who along with his wife, Chris, shared a rental house with Jordan and younger brother Steven last week. (Sister Ellie was back home in Dallas.) "Don't read anything about the golf, don't watch anything, just have nice, quiet family time."

That cloistered approach stood in stark contrast to Johnson's group. Paulina Gretzky chose Thursday of Open week, of all days, to release on Instagram a photo of herself in a tiny bikini, showing off a nubile post-pregnancy body. Although he was hitting the ball beautifully, Johnson complained after every round of all the squandered opportunities, which is of a piece for a player who habitually has done less with more. Johnson's raw talent has made him a fixture near the top of the World Ranking, but for years his coach, Butch Harmon, grumbled that every other top player was outworking his protégé. Johnson's on-course carelessness became part of the narrative when he blew prime chances at three major championships during the final round in the span of 13 months, beginning with the 2010 U.S. Open, where he took a three-stroke lead into Sunday and shot 82. In the cliquish South Florida golf community, stories began circulating of Johnson's excessive partying, but they were usually greeted with a shrug. It was just Dustin being Dustin.

Johnson's bad habits finally caught up with him last July, when he announced he was taking a "leave of absence" to address "personal challenges." Two days later SI senior writer Michael Bamberger reported on GOLF.com that Johnson had failed the third drug test of his career. Bamberger's highly placed confidential source had access to PGA Tour documents that spelled out the timing of the failed tests and the drugs in question (marijuana in 2009, cocaine in '12 and '14). Johnson was facing a six-month suspension that was satisfied by his leave, a game of semantics that was useful in preserving his lucrative endorsement portfolio, which at the time was estimated at \$5 million a year.

Still, Johnson's nonsuspension suspension seemed to be the first time in his career he was being held accountable for his actions. (In 2012, following the second failed test, he missed the Masters during an 11-week hiatus, an absence Johnson insisted was the result of being injured in a JetSki incident.) When he returned to action in February—almost six months to the day after he had left—Johnson said all the right things, to SI and others, about having matured. He seemed excited about the responsibilities of fatherhood. In March, in his fifth start back, he won the biggest tournament of his career, the WGC at Doral. It offered an easy tale of redemption that the media spooned up, but there was a dark lining. In the victor's press conference Bamberger asked Johnson if he had ever failed a drug test. Johnson offered a two-word answer: "No. Thanks."



NOT AGAIN

Johnson walked onto the 18th green with a chance to win, but he left it a shot short of a playoff.

● ● ●

Once again Johnson was skating by. Harry Vardon won a U.S. Open long before the modern media age—115 years ago, to be precise—but he had a fundamental understanding of golf's inner battle. "For this game," Vardon once said, "you need, above all things, to be in a tranquil frame of mind." Alone between the ropes, watched by the world, Johnson radiates an admirable insouciance, but something is clearly holding him back despite his manifold physical gifts. Spieth put his finger on it on Sunday night when he was asked if prevailing at golf's biggest events comes down to technique or character.

"I think both have to be there," he said.

Does the stress of major championships reveal who a person really is?

"I think a little bit, yeah," Spieth said. "Or at least you can then see exactly what it all means to somebody."

Those close to Johnson have always marveled at his ability to rebound from disappointment. As he was signing his scorecard, Paulina stood nearby, wiping away tears from behind her aviator shades. Wayne paced in circles. "I'm so upset for him," said the Great One of his future son-in-law. "He played his heart out. He was up, he was down, he was back in it, then it was gone. It stings."

When Johnson finally emerged, he was the only one smiling. He took Paulina by the hand, saying, "Hey, babe, come with me." They disappeared into the night.

Maybe Johnson can find what's missing at the Old Course. After all, it agreed with another massively talented bomber with a checkered past, John Daly. But St. Andrews is usually the domain of golf royalty. Jones, Nicklaus (twice), Seve Ballesteros, Nick Faldo and Woods (twice) are among those who have won the claret jug there. The quirky, craggy old links demands creativity, which makes it perfect for the new U.S. Open champ. As Spieth said in his charming way on Sunday, "I've proven to myself that I can win on a British-style golf course. Now I take it to the truest British-style golf course of any in the world."

Spieth joins Craig Wood, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer, Nicklaus and Woods in winning the Masters and the U.S. Open in the same year; only Hogan, in 1953, went on to take the British Open. Spieth departed Chambers Bay looking to make more history. The man he vanquished walked away still trying to find himself. □

Two for two

AT&T congratulates 2015 U.S. Open Champion
Jordan Spieth on his second major victory of the year.



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NBA FINALS

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CLASS PICTURE



STEPH CURRY stood on the corner of West 2nd Street and West Prospect Avenue in downtown Cleveland, smoking a cigar. It was 4 a.m. and the only passersby seemed to be homeless, drunk, or affiliated with the Warriors, who had just captured their first NBA championship in 40 years. Police spotted Curry lingering outside Morton's The Steakhouse, in a black dress shirt over dark jeans, and asked if he wanted some protection from onlookers. He was flanked by his father, Dell; Golden State's coach, Steve Kerr; and the team's player development coach, Bruce Fraser, who trains him every day. Between puffs the group marveled at the circular nature of life, how Steph was born 45 minutes away at Akron General Medical Center, and how he returned 27 years later to realize his destiny.

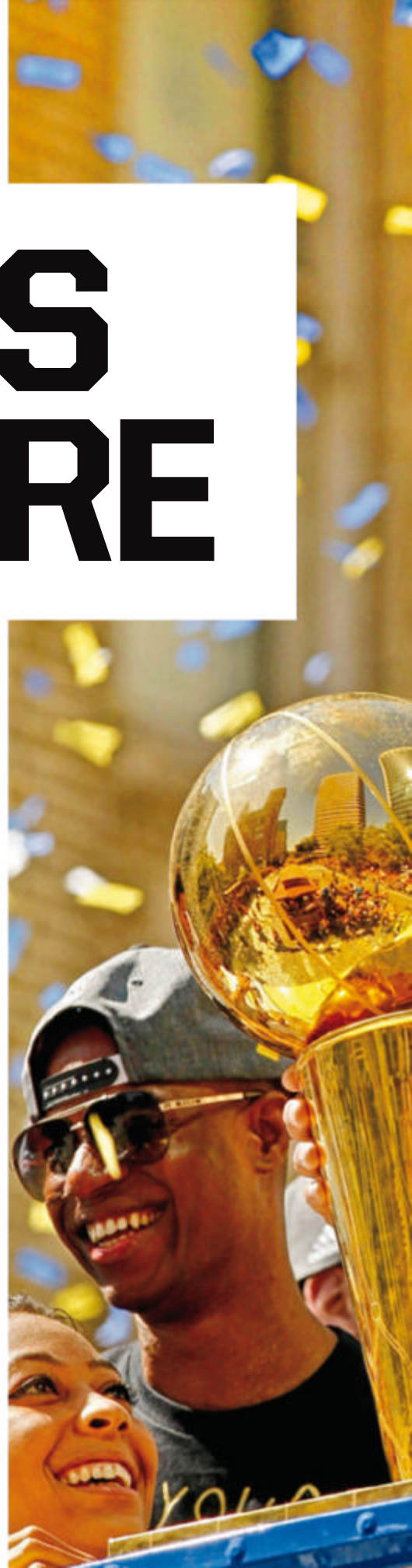
Dell shared a memory of Steph, when he was a month old, napping in his crib on the second floor of the family's suburban apartment. Dell's wife, Sonya, had gone out for a few hours and he was watching the boy alone for the first time. When Steph woke, Dell picked him up and carried him downstairs, but the young father was wearing socks and slipped on the hardwood. Dell fell down six steps, bruising both elbows, thinking the entire time, "My wife will kill me if I drop this baby." He never did.

The story reminded Kerr of his own son, Nick, who was also born nearby, at University Hospitals of Cleveland.

*Why is Steph Curry smiling?
Because he's got an adorable, press conference-stealing daughter, another child on the way, the sweetest stroke in the game and—after Golden State's Finals win—an NBA championship*

BY LEE JENKINS

Photograph by
Cary Edmondson
USA Today Sports







“This feels like the start of something,” Curry says. “I now understand why the greats have the mentality they do. The feeling is intoxicating.”

Like Dell, Steve played for the Cavaliers, and like Dell, he did not stay long. When Nick was three weeks old, Steve was already packing up the condo, traded to Orlando. That was 22 years ago. Today, Nick is a graduate of the University of San Diego, starting on a master's in public health at Cal this fall. Time disappears like rings of smoke in summer air.

“When are you going back to San Diego?” Fraser asked Kerr. “Saturday?”

“Maybe Friday,” Kerr replied. “Right after the parade.”

“Friday? What about the exit interviews?”

Kerr glanced at Steph. “What did you think of the year?”

“I thought it was incredible,” the point guard said.

“I thought it was incredible too. But you could really be a better shooter. I think you need to work on your shot this summer. Great year. Give me a hug.”

So concluded the most succinct exit interview ever, relayed by Fraser, and the most sarcastic. What more was there to say after Curry won the MVP and the title, broke his own record for three-pointers in a season and nearly doubled the mark for threes in a postseason? What more was there to say to all the Warriors after they went 83–20, 48–4 at home and won more games than any team that did not employ Michael Jordan? NBA champions traditionally suffer years of playoff agony before claiming their crown. Yet here were the Dubs, youngest champs in more than three decades, going straight from a first-round knockout to a nine-month joyride.

Kerr watched the spring's other wire-to-wire winner, American Pharoah, and chuckled at his favorite postrace tradition: the horseback TV reporter asking the jockey, “Tell us about your trip.” So, Steve, tell us about *your* trip.



CLEVELAND ROCKED
Curry stood tall against the Cavs, despite the best from James and Dellavedova (8).

In training camp, Kerr informed the Warriors, “We have the pieces here for a championship. Now I’m not going to talk about that again.” He didn’t, and at times the rookie coach lost confidence, until March 18, when Golden State blew out the Hawks with 39 of 44 baskets assisted. “This could be special,” Kerr told his wife, Margot. She owns a bracelet, too flashy to wear, with the ring faces from each of the five titles he won as a player. It was time to make room on the chain.

THE PARADE is over, having snaked through 1.1 million people from downtown Oakland to Lake Merritt, and Curry is mingling in the back of a white party tent. The Warriors surround him, smiling, hugging, and nibbling artisanal pizza from the spread at the center of the room. Beyond the tent, the throng stands in the sun, waiting for one more

glimpse of the players. “You know what this makes me think of?” Curry asks. “‘Can you dig it!’” That was Shaquille O’Neal’s catchphrase, belloved in 2000, at the first of three consecutive Lakers parades. Curry surveys the room: shooting guard Klay Thompson, 25; power forward Draymond Green, 25; small forward Harrison Barnes, 23—the bedrocks of another potential West Coast dynasty. “This feels like the start of something,” Curry says. “I now understand why the greats, who win multiples, have the mentality they do. The feeling is intoxicating.”

As Curry continues, the crowd in the tent swells. Camera-men approach with boom mikes. Friends try to catch his attention. Everybody seems to be shouting, except the man

He is the face of basketball, furthering the quaint notion that anyone with a Spalding, a hoop and a ravenous hunger can vanquish LeBron James.

in the middle of the ruckus, who never raises his voice or shifts his gaze. Curry understands the importance of public posture. He keeps an “image card” on the inside wall of his locker, which he received in the rookie transition program in 2009, instructing him to use “strong positive body language,” “good eye contact” and “inflection in your voice.” But he can’t manufacture inner peace, the unmistakable serenity that allows him to focus amid frenzy, and hurl flames at giants.

“For me, that comes from faith and family,” Curry says. “It’s who I am. It gives me balance. This is a high-pressure job. *You gotta win. You gotta win. You gotta win.* If you can turn it off for a while and make life normal, you can balance yourself out before you have to do it all over again.” His parents stayed at his house during the Finals, an arrangement that would rattle some players, but relaxed Curry. Dell, a shooting guard for 16 seasons who never advanced beyond the second round, drove with Steph to Game 1 at Oracle Arena. “I wish I could tell you what this is like,” Dell said, and they laughed. After games Steph played spades with Sonya until his mind mellowed and sleep beckoned.

Only now, in the parking lot of the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center, is he alone. Everybody else in the organization has ascended to the stage for the postparade rally. Green has posed for pictures with the Oakland police, telling them, “I’m flying past every one of you on the street.” Finals MVP Andre Iguodala has pantsed Thompson. Curry finally walks up the steps and peers over the lake, reminded of his first Bay Area apartment. Six years ago the Timberwolves drafted two point guards in the lottery, passing on Curry both times. Four years ago Warriors coach Keith Smart used Acie Law



CURRYING FAVOR

Iguodala celebrated a Game 5 win, while Kerr got a hug after the Warriors took Game 6.

in the fourth quarter of games, believing the team was better off with Curry on the bench. Two years ago Nike declined to match an endorsement offer Curry received from Under Armour. Today, he is the face of basketball, furthering the quaint notion that anyone with a Spalding, a hoop and a ravenous hunger can vanquish LeBron James. You can be 6' 3", 190. You don't have to look like a superhero. It is a sweet sentiment, though Curry is no less superhero than James. Curry's secret power—sublime hand-eye coordination—is just harder to detect.

If James is a blunt weapon, Curry is a finely tuned instrument, maintained through meticulous routine. He walks to the court, pumping his arms like a drummer boy, with power forward David Lee. He ties his shoes on the same chair, shoots on the same rim and takes that last heave from the tunnel with the same security guard, Curtis Jones. He endures the obvious OCD jokes. “The routine gives me things I can count on,” Curry explains. But the Finals steals comforts, replacing golf outings with travel days, forcing practices from familiar gyms to cavernous arenas. Fraser, who works with Curry more than any other Warriors coach, wondered how his carefully calibrated megastar would acclimate.

Even the trips that look easy never are.

ON THE off day between Games 3 and 4, the Warriors practiced at Quicken Loans Arena. They trailed the Cavaliers 2–1 and were concerned about Curry. He fell on his head in the Western Conference finals against the Rockets, and though he downplayed the effects, coaches believed he was reluctant to drive to the basket. In the four games after the spill, he shot

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38.1% from the field and 31.1% from three, culminating in a 5-for-23, 2-for-15 clunker in Game 2. He was out of tune.

Maybe the fall caused the slump, or maybe the Finals itinerary was to blame. It could have been both of those, or neither, just a guy finally clanking a few open jumpers. During that practice in Cleveland, Fraser told Curry, “I want you to think about *this*.” He made a motion with his hands, raising an imaginary ball from his belly to his neck.

The Warriors implemented a handful of ingenious adjustments throughout the playoffs. Against the Grizzlies, they put center Andrew Bogut on guard Tony Allen and dared him to let fly, while double-teaming power forward Zach Randolph and funneling him toward the baseline. Against the Rockets they switched Barnes onto shooting guard James Harden, and against the Cavs they started Iguodala for the first time this season, using the 6' 7" Green at center. What Fraser did for Curry between Games 3 and 4 did not fall in the same category. He used to suggest adjustments in release point, arm angle, foot position. Then, in the middle of games, Curry would misfire and ask Fraser, “What’s wrong? What are you seeing?”

Fraser feared that Curry was overanalyzing what he said, not an unprecedented occurrence. The first summer that trainer Rob McClanaghan worked with Curry, at a Bel Air home gym in 2013, he told him to split an imaginary ball screen, drive down the middle and put up a floater. Three minutes of questions followed. “Where is the ball screen set? How many dribbles after the split? Where exactly do I take off? Do I jump off one foot or two?”

In the summer, inquiry is encouraged, but in the season a shooter needs a clear head. Fraser backed away, and when he wanted to offer a suggestion, he expressed it in the broadest terms. *Think about this*. In Game 4, Curry took Fraser’s general advice and made a subtle mechanical tweak, extending the ball a little farther from his body as he raised it. “What I did was so slight, nobody would have noticed,” Curry says. “I don’t know if that was the key, but Bruce got me thinking, and that got me more locked into feeling my body.”

Again, it is impossible to pinpoint what throws a marksman off-track, and what eases him back on. But Curry was steady in Game 4 and sensational in Game 5, putting up 37 points on 13-for-23 shooting. The forever sequence of Curry’s playoffs was his game-tying corner three in the first round while getting knocked down by two Pelicans—“With his eyes closed,” Sonya adds—but the double-crossover step-back three over Matthew Dellavedova in Game 5 ranks a close second. The MVP was back, and two days later, the Delly was closed. It is popular to call Curry the finest shooter of all time, but in some ways, that title shortchanges him. “He’s a shotmaker,”

**ROAD
WARRIORS**
Golden State
clinched the title
in Cleveland,
as Curry had
25 points in a
105-97 victory.



says McClanaghan, who trains many premier point guards. “He’s not just out there shooting threes. It’s five dribbles, behind-the-back and through-the-legs, then a step-back three or a floater with the left or the right hand. That’s more than a shooter. That’s someone who does it all.”

IN THE end Kerr buckled to convention, conducting exit interviews at the practice facility the day before the parade. “I have to be more consistent,” Curry says. “We’re going to get everybody’s best shot, so if I don’t improve, it will show.” He has rushed headlong to the top. The Warriors daydream about what he can accomplish if he learns to change speeds and exploit angles, as Steve Nash once did. The specter of the two-time MVP has hovered over Curry since the moment he entered the league. “I drafted him partly because he reminded me of Steve,” says Don Nelson, who coached Nash in Dallas and Curry in Golden State. “They are very similar.” Curry was more aggressive than Nash; Nash more probing than Curry. Four years after Nelson retired to Maui, Golden State coincidentally started hiring people who used to work with Nash in Phoenix: Kerr, Fraser, guard Leandro Barbosa and assistant coach Jarron Collins.

Nash was employed by the Lakers but sat out all season with nerve damage in his back. He passed casual advice to Curry, via Fraser. When Curry slowed before the All-Star

It is popular to call Curry the finest shooter of all time, but that title shortchanges him. He is, says McClanaghan, “someone who does it all.”

break, amid photo shoots and public appearances, Nash cautioned him about the cumulative effect of off-court commitments. When Curry received his MVP trophy in a pregame ceremony during the conference semifinals, Nash warned him that it would be hard to settle his emotions. The Warriors promptly sustained one of their two home playoff losses.

In an interview announcing his retirement three months ago, Nash said he had no plans to coach, though Fraser did once flip him a Golden State staff shirt. But Nash enjoys tutoring players individually, and the Warriors are trying to set him up with Curry. So if you happen to swing by a Boys & Girls Club in San Diego's North County this summer, don't be surprised to see a couple of historic point guards inside.

Of course Curry could also do nothing but golf, and Golden State would still be in pole position come opening night. Every major contributor will return, including Green, a restricted free agent the Warriors intend to re-sign. “You just don't want to mess it up,” says general manager Bob Myers, who grew up in the San Francisco suburb of Alamo, rooting for Sleepy Floyd and Run TMC. “But you also don't want to be too passive.” In the cutthroat Western Conference, standing pat can mean falling behind. The Thunder, assuming Kevin Durant's troublesome right foot heals, will contend again. The Clippers, who acquired volatile swingman Lance Stephenson last week, will be a threat to others as well as themselves. The Pelicans, who hired coach Alvin Gentry off Golden State's bench, will take a leap. The Rockets are still an enticing destination for a third headliner. The Grizzlies and the Spurs aren't going anywhere. And if the Warriors do survive the West gantlet again, James will likely be waiting for them once more, with reinforcements next time.

“It's going to be the same fight, the same game,” says Seahawks tailback and Oakland native Marshawn Lynch, who attended the rally four months after his team came one yard short of a repeat. “Your mentality can't change. Your



SPLASH, BROTHER

The Dubs made sure that their sharpshooter's trophy time was plenty wet.

hunger can't change. But I don't know. I didn't do it.” Mychal Thompson, Klay's dad, did go back-to-back 27 years ago with the Lakers. “Winning the first one gives you presence,” Thompson says. “It gives you belief. You get behind, you feel like you can come back, like no moment is too big.”

Golden State's offense, like San Antonio's, is based on reads atop reads. This season the Warriors led the league in points by a wide margin, but they can grow more prolific, as they peel back the system's layers. Assistants caught themselves on flights in the Finals talking excitedly about training camp. Defense could be a challenge, since Golden State's switch-all scheme demands max effort, and championship runs sap everybody. But the Warriors are a different crew, led by two sons of NBA players and several other offspring of educators. They are unusually functional. Kerr called only two team meetings.

Their biggest scandal might have involved a song, “CoCo” by O.T. Genasis, which they belted out on the plane after victories, Barbosa adding Portuguese exclamations. *CoCo* refers to cocaine, and when executives requested that the players stop singing it, they complied. But to the Warriors, the tune was symbolic of a bond, not a drug. So upon dispatching the Cavaliers, they gathered in a private room at Morton's and hollered the lyrics as loudly as they could. Curry, forever on the perimeter, listened with his wife, Ayesha, and two-year-old daughter, Riley.

The next night, Curry held a backyard barbecue, while Game 6 re-aired on TV. Even after the parade, when most of the Warriors jetted to Las Vegas, he stayed home for the weekend. Dell wanted to play golf, Riley wanted to roller skate, and Ayesha needed to rest. She is due with the next Curry in July.

Basketball's first family is booming.

□





NHL
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THE SEVENTH COMING

THERE'S A NEW HEIR IN THE LINE OF TEENAGE HOCKEY ROYALTY THAT RUNS FROM CROSBY THROUGH LEMIEUX AND GRETZKY, AND BACK TO ORR. CONNOR MCDAVID, YOUR THRONE—AND AN OILERS SWEATER—AWAIT

BY AUSTIN MURPHY



Photograph by
Bill Wippert
Getty Images

RUNNING UNOPPOSED

It's a certainty that Edmonton will take the baby-faced McDavid with the first pick in the draft.



IS THIS an interview with a teenage hockey player, or a CIA covert operation? “Sixth floor at 7:15,” says the June 7 text from the grim-visaged NHL official whose job at the Stanley Cup finals is to mind and monitor Connor McDavid, the boy with the handsome mug who will soon be the face of the NHL—probably before his mild acne clears up.

Emerging from the elevator on the sixth floor of a downtown Chicago hotel, a reporter takes several wrong turns before locating the Chosen One, who is seated on an out-of-the-way sofa, across from his unsmiling handler. McDavid, draped in a golf shirt, rises and extends a hand. In person he bears more than a passing resemblance to Justin Bieber, although the Biebs, it is only fair to point out, has the more yoked upper body. That McDavid seems somewhat physically ordinary, at first glance, makes his feats on the ice all the more incredible.

The remoteness of the rendezvous, the presence of the league factotum—it seems a bit unnecessary.

While his profile is considerably higher in Canada, McDavid could still walk down Michigan Avenue at rush hour and go unrecognized. For now. The NHL draft, starting on June 26 in Sunrise, Fla.—a felicitous locale for teams seeking a fresh start—will mark the beginning of the end of his anonymity in the U.S.

This year's first pick, property of the woe-begone Oilers, is the biggest no-brainer since the Sidney Crosby Sweepstakes, aka the 2005 NHL draft. Edmonton will take McDavid, a 6' 1", 195-pound center with a lefthanded shot honed, since before his third birthday, on the driveway (and in the garage and basement) of his family's Newmarket, Ont., home. Such is McDavid's superabundance of skills, so ridiculous his stats, that even now his plinth is being winched onto a pedestal in the figurative pantheon of the six Canadian junior hockey prodigies to precede him: Bobby Orr, Guy Lafleur, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Eric Lindros and Crosby. McDavid, dubbed by Gretzky “the best player to come into the league in the last 30 years,” has been referred to in the Canadian press as “the Seventh Son.”

MCDAVID IS, in fact, the second son of Brian and Kelly McDavid. Birth order, to hear Brian tell it, played no small role in Connor's development. Brian and Kelly's first son, Cameron, 3½ years older than Connor, was also passionate about hockey, spending many of his waking hours Rollerblading around the garage, stickhandling, practicing his shot. Almost from the time he could walk, "Connor was desperate to join in," Brian says.

Connor joined his brother and, after a few years, surpassed him. Using old paint cans, a spare skateboard and other items from the garage, Connor would set up an obstacle course in the driveway. To the paint cans he would tape cut-down hockey sticks, simulating the gap between the skates and the stick-blade of a defender. He would stickhandle through the course, then take a shot. He would time himself and record those times. In Canada's national mythology McDavid's driveway obstacle course will soon take on a significance similar to the backyard rinks built by Walter Gretzky, who would remind his oldest son, "Go to where the puck is going, not where it has been."

None of which was on Kelly's mind when she would ask her husband, "Would you please get Connor out of the driveway? He's not enjoying his childhood."

"It looks like he's having fun to me," Brian would reply.

"Kids do what they like to do, and that's what I liked to do," says Connor, with a smile. "So that's what I did."

His precocity wasn't limited to the physical realm. Cam played for a house league team. "The local hockey association liked the kids to wear dress shirts and ties to games," Brian recalls. Too young to play, Connor nonetheless insisted on wearing a tie to his brother's games and following him into the dressing room. There, Connor filled water bottles and listened intently to the pregame talks, after which coaches would quiz the players. "Sometimes the older boys didn't know the answer to the question," says Brian, who was an assistant coach, "and Connor would be sitting there with his hand up." He was five.

Even then, McDavid was thinking the game. From his earliest days on the ice he stayed out of the scrum that invariably formed around loose pucks along the boards. "There would be nine kids hacking and whacking at the puck," says Brian,



97 REASONS

In three OHL seasons, McDavid's goals total matched his Erie uniform number (above). At the world juniors in January, he led Canada to gold (below).



whose son would stand at a slight remove. *Go to where the puck is going.* . . . "So it would squirt out, Connor would grab it, race up the ice unimpeded and usually score."

"Some players just play," says Craig Button, the former Flames general manager who is now director of scouting for Canadian sports network TSN. "One of [McDavid's] best qualities is that he's always looking at the game, trying to understand it better, asking, How could I take advantage of that situation? What would I do differently? He's got a brilliant hockey mind."

Button refers to it as "processing speed." (The *o* in processing, like the wait between generational players, is long, as enunciated by Button.) "In all my years I've never seen his combination of flat-out speed combined with processing speed—the ability to understand what's unfolding around him, where opportunity is, where danger lurks—and then the skills, the ability to execute."

"We talk about Pavel Bure, the Russian Rocket, we talk about Mario Lemieux's fantastic hands and reach, and about Wayne Gretzky's ability to process. I think McDavid combines those three elements in one player."

Yes, but will this Pavo LeGretzky backcheck, once he gets to the NHL? Will he play both ends of the ice? "Watch his games," says Dan Marr, director of NHL Central Scouting. "He's one of the first forwards back on the play. He works hard on his play without the puck. He's very responsible. You're never going to label him a two-way forward"—one would just as soon hire Jasper Johns to paint the powder room—"but he can play a two-way game without any issues."

While it may be fun to compare McDavid with stars from bygone eras, it's not useful, says Marr. "When Wayne Gretzky played, the pace of the

game was different.” Which is his polite way of saying that McDavid, blessed with a jawdropping burst, is faster than the Great One ever was. “The rules have changed, the equipment has changed, the comparisons aren’t valid,” says Marr. “But for today’s game Connor McDavid is the real deal.”

That’s why they Sabres wanted him so desperately. To improve their chances in the draft lottery, the Buffalo front office methodically stripped the team of assets (trading its starting goaltender, *twice*, for instance), an exercise dubbed Operation McTank by the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*. Racing the Sabres to the bottom were the Coyotes, who unloaded their two top scorers at the trade deadline, to no avail: Arizona’s 56 points, two more than Buffalo’s 54, were good for only 29th place. Sabres fans did their part down the stretch, cheering goals by the opposing team, and using the hashtag #TankforMcDavid on social media. Many purchased Buffalo jerseys with McDavid’s name on the back. When the Sabres finished last in the standings for the second straight season, everything seemed to be lining up for them. Then, heartbreak: The Oilers, despite holding just an

“Some
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11.5% chance to get the top pick, as the third-worst team in the league, won the lottery. It was the second year in a row that Buffalo had lost the lottery despite having the best chance at the top pick. As hockey pundit Katie Brown of NHL.com tweeted, “The Buffalo Sabres can’t even win at losing.”

The second-best player in this year’s draft is not exactly a booby prize. As a freshman at Boston University last season, Jack Eichel led the nation in scoring (26 goals, 45 assists) and won the Hobey Baker Award, hockey’s Heisman. Like McDavid, the 6' 2", 196-pound Eichel is a center, and a “generational” talent. Unlike McDavid, he’s a righthanded shot who plays the game with more of a physical edge. Brimming with confidence, Eichel earlier this month shared with several teams at the NHL scouting combine his belief that he will end up being better than McDavid.

As the two brightest young stars in the hockey firmament, McDavid and Eichel have long been linked. The same night in April that Eichel won the Hobey Baker, McDavid scored five goals for the Erie Otters, in a second-round OHL playoff victory over the London Knights. Eichel’s quiet

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PEANUTY,
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CONNOR MCDAVID

boasts at the combine served as a bit of Sriracha on their long-running rivalry, which, as their NHL careers begin, will only get hotter.

"It doesn't bother me," McDavid replied, when asked if Eichel had annoyed him. "He obviously believes in his abilities, and I believe in my abilities. [Reporters] make a bigger deal of it because it's Jack saying that. But it doesn't bother me too much. We'll see what happens."

Translation: It bothers him.

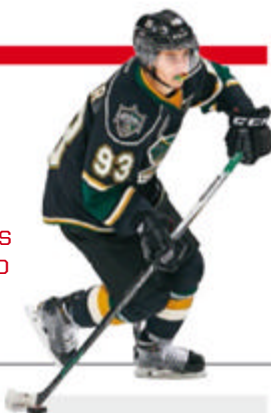
AMONG THE Sabres fans crestfallen by Edmonton's good fortune was one Bob Catalde, a Buffalo transplant now living in Erie, Pa. Catalde, an attorney, is a self-described "hockey person" whose daughter Camryn is named after longtime Bruins power forward Cam Neely. Three years ago Catalde and his wife, Stephanie, opened their home to McDavid, whom the Otters had taken with the first pick in the OHL draft. McDavid had been granted "exceptional player status" from Hockey Canada, allowing him to compete in the league a year early, at the age of 15.

TOP TALENTS

NAMES TO KNOW

Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel are the big prizes this year, but there are a number of other prospects with franchise-altering potential in the class of 2015. Here are 10 names you need to know ahead of the June 26-27 draft

BY ALLAN MUIR



DYLAN STROME

C

Erie Otters

6' 3", 185 pounds
45-84-129, 68 games

Vision and hockey sense are this playmaker's key assets. The OHL's leading scorer doesn't control a game so much as react to it, taking advantage of what opponents give him.

NHL COMPARABLE
Eric Staal

IVAN PROVOROV

D

Brandon Wheat Kings

6 feet, 201 pounds
15-46-61, 60 games

A physical specimen whose hockey sense allows him to play calm and controlled; he's a master of the breakout, a key in today's possession-based systems.

NHL COMPARABLE
Roman Josi

MITCH MARNER

RW

London Knights

5' 11", 160 pounds
44-82-126, 63 games

Overcomes his lack of size with elite possession skills—there's not a better dangler in the draft. A fast skater and a dazzling playmaker, he has superstar potential.

NHL COMPARABLE
Patrick Kane

NOAH HANIFIN

D

Boston College

6' 3", 203 pounds
5-18-23, 37 games

A dynamic two-way player and a nifty skater. He's not a physical force in his own end, but he is positionally sound. And few blueliners are as effective in transition.

NHL COMPARABLE
Jay Bouwmeester

MATHEW BARZAL

C

Seattle Thunderbirds

5' 11", 175 pounds
12-45-57, 44 games

He's breathtakingly fast, but it's his east-west movement and the way he uses it to create time and space that make him so dangerous. A gifted playmaker.

NHL COMPARABLE
Matt Duchene

Could this fresh-faced adolescent hack it playing against 17- and 18-year-olds? The suspense didn't last long. Starting with his second game, McDavid had a point in 15 straight matches. He finished the season with 25 goals and 66 points in 63 games, and won the OHL's rookie of the year award. All of which was a kind of orchestral tune-up to the symphony he performed that spring at the 2013 U-18 world championships in Sochi. McDavid scored hat tricks in victories over Sweden and the Czech Republic. With eight goals and six assists, he was the MVP of the tournament while leading Canada to its first gold medal in five years; McDavid and Canada defeated Eichel and Team USA 3-2 in the final. As one NHL scouting director told *Sportsnet* magazine, "He put the Canadian team on his back and carried it. It was probably the best performance ever by a player at the under-18s."

The success did not seem to go to the prodigy's head. In his spare time, when not in high school or at practice, McDavid could be found in the Catalde family living room, engaged in furious battles of "knee hockey" with Catalde's son, 10-year-old Nico. When his schedule allowed, McDavid would lace up his skates and join Nico at practice with the Erie Lions, the boy's peewee team. "He waits in line and does the drills as if he were one of the players," says Bob, the coach. "Watching him, you'd think there's no place he'd rather be."

"He didn't have to come here," says Otters co-owner Owen McCormick. Erie was beyond awful in 2011-12, going 10-52-3, thus earning the right to select McDavid. "He could've orchestrated a trade. We were the worst team in the league."

Instead, the 15-year-old looked into the TV cam-

CLAUS ANDERSEN/GETTY IMAGES (MARNER)



DESTINY BOUND

For better or worse, Oilers fans are sure to compare McDavid—who participated in the scouting combine (left)—with Gretzky (above, in 1978).

eras and described the opportunity to play for the Otters as “an honor.” In his second year in the OHL, he led Erie to a 106-point season. In 2014–15 the Otters advanced to the OHL finals, losing in five games to the Oshawa Generals. In spearheading the turnaround, McDavid transformed the Erie Insurance Arena from an oversized mausoleum to a loud, electric destination, full of waving white towels and buzz.

CAN HE do the same for the Oilers? It is a measure of their sustained dreadfulness that they are sitting on their fourth No. 1 pick in the last six years. It’s been nine seasons since this once dynastic franchise reached the postseason. But there is hope. Days after the draft lottery, CEO Bob Nicholson axed general manager Craig MacTavish, replacing him with highly regarded ex-Boston GM Peter Chiarelli,



whose first big move was to bring in Todd McLellan, a good head coach who’d grown stale after seven mostly successful seasons with the Sharks.

The wages of Edmonton’s ineptitude aren’t all bad. While its defense is porous—its goaltending is among the worst in the league—the club has stockpiled a handful of gifted young forwards, foremost among them left wing Taylor Hall, the top selection in the 2010 draft, who tweeted his passing preferences to McDavid moments after the lottery: “Hey @cmcdavid97 left shot black tape left side.”

Hall, Jordan Eberle (No. 22, 2008), Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (No. 1, ’11) and Nail Yakupov (No. 1, ’12) should be the beneficiaries of McDavid’s world-class burst, which Button describes as paradoxical: “He’s got the ability to use his speed—this is the paradox—to slow the game down. When he’s coming at you, as a defender, you’ve gotta back off, and when that happens, now he can slow up and canvass the opportunities as other players join the rush.” McDavid’s knack for toggling between speeds keeps defensemen off-balance. Says Button, “You’re never comfortable playing against him.”

How comfortable will McDavid be, making his living in the city that Gretzky put on the map? Comparisons with 99 will begin immediately. The savior business could get old, in a hurry.

“My experience in Erie gives me hope that teams aren’t always stuck in a rebuilding phase,” says McDavid, who seems to welcome the burden he is about to shoulder. As Brian explains, his son’s expectations for himself “even exceed” those placed on him by others. “So for Connor, this is not a burden. It’s the realization of a dream.” It is, as the McDavids like to say, “a great problem to have.” □

ZACH WERENSKI

D

Michigan

6' 2", 206 pounds
9-16-25, 35 games

One scout says he’s a “next-gen” defenseman, praising his blend of awareness, positioning, passing and skating as the modern ideal for the position. Doesn’t turn 18 until July 19.

NHL COMPARABLE
Ryan McDonagh

LAWSON CROUSE

LW

Kingston Frontenacs

6' 4", 213 pounds
29-22-51, 56 games

The most divisive prospect of 2015 has the size and strength to create scoring chances. But does he also have the skill to finish? Could go third or could slide out of the top 10.

NHL COMPARABLE
Andrew Ladd

MIKKO RANTANEN

RW

TPS Turku (Finland)

6' 4", 211 pounds
9-19-28, 56 games

The draft’s highest-rated European skater has been a presence in Finland’s top league since he was 16. He has the size of a power forward but the quickness of a much smaller player.

NHL COMPARABLE
James van Riemsdyk

PAVEL ZACHA

C

Sarnia Sting

6' 3", 210 pounds
16-18-34, 37 games

Everything about his game is powerful: his build, his skating, his shot. He is at his best when he relies on his pure offensive gifts. His shoot-first style may work better on the wing.

NHL COMPARABLE
David Backes

ILYA SAMSONOV

G

Magnitogorsk (Russia)

6' 4", 203 pounds
11-4-1, .918 save %

He impressed scouts with a 49-save effort in a 3-1 win over the U.S. at U-18 worlds in April. He also plays with flair, and will sometimes scramble to make an acrobatic stop.

NHL COMPARABLE
Sergei Bobrovsky

BASEBALL'S GREAT EXPERIMENT

Sports Illustrated

JUNE 30, 2014 | SI.COM

HOPE BEYOND
THE HEARTBREAK
**U.S. SOCCER'S
MOMENT**
BY GRANT WAHL
P. 48

An Unprecedented Look
At How a Franchise Is
Going Beyond Moneyball
To Build the Game's
NEXT BIG THING....

~~YOUR 2017~~
**WORLD SERIES
CHAMPS**

BY BEN REITER
P. 30

THE ASTROS'
**GEORGE
SPRINGER**

The Astros are headed for a fourth straight last-place finish, but a front office that has seamlessly woven old-fashioned scouting (Nolan Ryan!) with modern metrics (a director of decision sciences!) is hoarding young championship-caliber talent.





IF BAD news comes in threes, then the Astros sustained at least two full sets of the stuff over the course of a single month last summer. Consider the following string of calamities, all of which occurred between mid-June and mid-July:

1. Their internal database, Ground Control—which contains scouting and medical reports and statistical projections, among other proprietary data—was revealed to have been hacked, and notes their executives had made about 10 months of private trade talks with other clubs were posted online.
2. Their best prospect, then 19-year-old short-stop Carlos Correa, broke his right leg while sliding into third base in a minor league game.
3. They became just the third team ever to fail to sign the No. 1 overall selection in the June draft, after a postdraft medical exami-

nation reportedly revealed irregularities in the pitching elbow of their pick, high school southpaw Brady Aiken, and Aiken refused to accept their reduced offer.

4. They also failed to sign their fifth-round pick, high school righty Jacob Nix, because the Aiken contretemps meant they no longer had enough bonus pool money to pay Nix the \$1.5 million to which the parties had agreed.
5. Modern Woodmen Park, the Davenport, Iowa, home of the Quad Cities River Bandits, one of their Class A affiliates, was rendered an island due to the overflowing waters of the adjacent Mississippi River.
6. The leftfield wall of the Hangar, the home ballpark of another of their Class A affiliates, the Lancaster (Calif.) JetHawks, was lit ablaze during a defective fireworks display.

All of this happened well before the most shocking development of all. That was last

2015? ~~2016~~ EARLY LAUNCH

In the last year the Astros have had several setbacks—including a bizarre database hack by a rival front office. But Houston is in first place, its rebuilding plan ahead of schedule. So much for that cover jinx. . . .

BY BEN REITER

Photograph by
Otto Greule Jr.
Getty Images

week's revelation, via a report by Michael S. Schmidt of *The New York Times*, that the FBI and the Justice Department are investigating as-yet unnamed officials within the Cardinals' front office for the database hack. The alleged perpetrators were therefore former coworkers of Jeff Luhnow—the Cardinals' former scouting director, who left in December 2011 to become the Astros' GM and eventually took several of his colleagues with him to Houston. According to subsequent reports, the feds are investigating four or five Cardinals officials, and the hackers took steps to cover the tracks of their intrusions, which were made multiple times between '12 and '14. The club could face penalties ranging from a fine to a thorough defeathering, if knowledge of the activity is shown to have extended high up the hierarchy. ("These are serious allegations that don't reflect who we are as an organization," owner Bill DeWitt Jr. said in a statement. "If anyone within our organization is determined to be involved in anything inappropriate, they will be held accountable.")

Last summer's catastrophes might have

been enough to force even very rational people to believe in curses, perhaps in the one famously ascribed to a certain national sports publication, which last June put the long moribund Astros on its cover next to the audacious headline **YOUR 2017 WORLD SERIES CHAMPS**. The Astros' front office under Luhnow, however, is not just *very* rational, but possibly the most rational in all of professional sports; after all, it includes an employee titled Director of Decision Sciences, the former NASA researcher Sig Mejdal.

That Houston finished the 2014 season



HACK ATTACK

Luhnow (right) says he is on good terms with the Cardinals' front office, which is run by GM John Mozeliak (above).

with a record of 70–92, well below .500 for the sixth straight year, cannot be counted among its setbacks. The record was a by-product of Luhnow's plan to transform baseball's leading laughingstock into a perennial contender as quickly as possible, a plan that was not predicated on the pursuit of a best-case scenario, but on the long-term accumulation of scouting- and analytics-driven decisions, each of which had been made with the knowledge that it, individually, might not work out.

Last summer's misfortunes, though, generated rounds of hearty Schadenfreude in certain baseball quarters. Some viewed Luhnow and his cohorts as know-it-all outsiders—before accepting his first job in baseball in 2003, Luhnow was a technology executive—who operated with the cold-eyed ruthlessness of management consultants, which Luhnow also once was.

ASTROS

"We went from 51 wins in '13 to 70 wins in '14," said Luhnow before the season. "Now we've got to go from 70 to 89. We're going to get there."



Their rough month was, in this view, appropriate comeuppance, though Luhnow took his organization's mishaps in stride.

This past March, as he watched the Astros play the Mets in a spring training game in Port St. Lucie, the 48-year-old Luhnow remained optimistic. "We're expecting continued progress," he said. "We went from 51 wins in '13 to 70 wins in '14. Now we've got to go from 70 to 89. Whether we do that in one or two years, we're going to get there."

A year after their miserable summer, the Astros are ahead of schedule. Through Sunday they were in first place in the AL West with a record of 41–30, putting them on pace for 94 wins, and the events of last season had been washed away by a torrent of positive developments. Even the report of the stunning alleged source of their database breach didn't faze the

team, which won four of six games after the news broke. One of the only questions about the Houston Astros now is whether that national sports publication was too conservative by a season or two in its prediction of the franchise's first-ever title.

THE ASTROS were widely pilloried for their failure to sign Aiken and Nix last July, accused of cynically and perhaps wrongfully damaging the futures of a pair of teenagers. The club, however, believed that it was merely playing by the draft's convoluted rules. If they did not sign their selection, whom they believed to be an injury risk (though the club's executives have never publicly commented on Aiken's medical reports), then the Astros would be compensated with the No. 2 overall selection in this year's draft. That, combined with the high pick they would earn thanks to their losing record (ultimately fifth overall) and the enormous draft bonus pool that would result, some \$17.3 million,

would set them up for a potentially huge draft haul in 2015. (Though it would not include the unfortunate Aiken or Nix, both of whom exercised their right to block Houston from drafting them again.)

The Astros' detractors were quieted in March, when Aiken tore his ulnar collateral ligament just 12 pitches into his first start with Florida's IMG Academy. Then on June 8, the first day of this year's draft, the Astros came away with three of the top eight players, according to *Baseball America's* rankings: LSU shortstop Alex Bregman, whom they took second overall; Florida high school outfielder Kyle Tucker, whom they took eighth; and Georgia high school outfielder Daz Cameron, son of big leaguer Mike Cameron, who fell to 37th because of his aggressive contractual demands, but whom the Astros felt confident they could sign.



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ASTROS

That trio of prospects will, if signed, fortify a stacked farm system whose teams have combined to go 174–106 so far this season, for a winning percentage (.621) that is currently better than that of any single big league team's except for—yes—the Cardinals'. The system no longer features the 6' 4", 210-pound Correa, who, with his leg healed, debuted in the majors on June 8 and has since performed better than any 20-year-old should. Through 13 games he is batting .304 with three homers, four steals and a number of dazzling defensive plays.

It also no longer features starters Lance McCullers and Vincent Velasquez, both of whom were promoted directly from Double A and are becoming rotation mainstays. But it does still include a host of other potential stars, like first basemen Jon Singleton and A.J. Reed and outfielders Derek Fisher and Brett Phillips, each of whom is 23 or younger this season and each of whom already has at least 50 RBIs and an OPS better than .870. They are waiting to bolster a lineup that already leads the majors with 103 homers.

The Astros' fecund farm system ought to make them a leading contender to add a major piece at the July 31 nonwaiver trade deadline, perhaps a frontline starter—like the Phillies' Cole Hamels or the Reds' Johnny Cueto—to buoy a rotation that is a pedestrian 19th in ERA, at 4.20. "I've been a seller for the three years I've been a GM," Luhnow said during spring training. "I'd love to be a buyer. That'd be great. This could be the year."

O F COURSE, back in Port St. Lucie in March, Luhnow could not have known that the breach of his database was not perpetrated by a mischievous random hacker, but by front-office personnel of baseball's most traditionally upstanding of clubs, and that he would become embroiled as the victim in what threatens to develop into his sport's biggest scandal in years.

Last week Luhnow made his first comments about the *Times's* report in



FUTURE IS NOW

Correa (above) and McCullers (left) have quickly gone from prospects to key contributors on a first-place team.

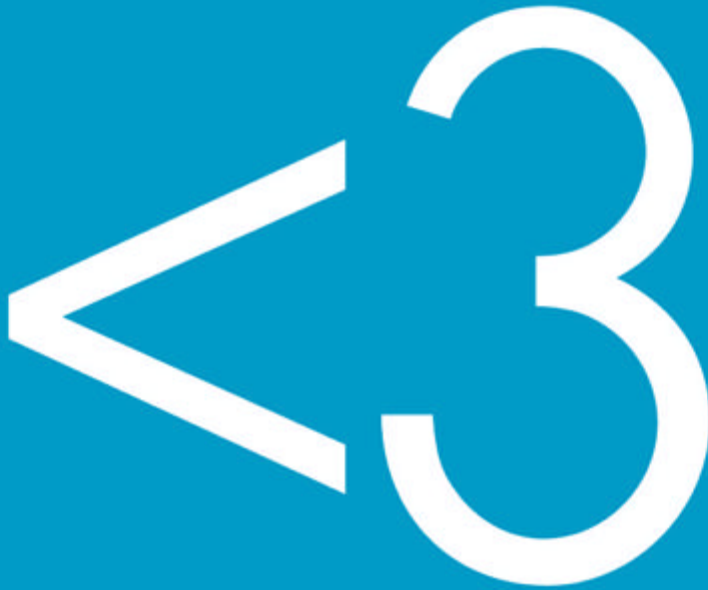
an exclusive interview with SI.com. He addressed the report's implication that the hackers had been able to access Ground Control because he had failed to change his old passwords from his Cardinals days. "That's absolutely false," said the GM. "I absolutely know about password hygiene and best practices." He also spoke about the assertion that the offending Cardinals officials might have been motivated by a suspicion that he had taken proprietary information from their own database, called Redbird, to create Ground Control. "I'm very aware of intellectual property and the agreements I signed," he said. "I didn't take anything, any proprietary information. Nor have we ever received any inquiries from anybody that even suggested that we had."

He disputed the perception, reported by many with strong access to the Cardinals,

that he had been a polarizing executive in St. Louis, and had left behind him a cadre of revenge-seeking former colleagues. "I was friendly with the people I left behind there," he said. "A lot of them came to my wedding, when I got married in January of 2012. This wasn't a bad breakup. It was a happy promotion of a person to a higher position in another organization."

The hack might yet prove to be the most perpetually damaging of the series of setbacks the Astros sustained last summer, as it's hard to know exactly what proprietary data was mined and how widely the hackers might have privately shared it. "It's difficult to assess the effect," Luhnow said.

It hasn't, however, derailed the Astros. There will surely be more pitfalls along the way: players who get injured or underperform; draft picks who don't sign (as of Monday, with 3½ weeks remaining until the July 17 deadline, the club was still negotiating with Bregman and Cameron). But if a badly injured über-prospect and a draft controversy, not to mention the twin punch lines of a flood and a fire, weren't enough to set them off course, then this probably won't be either. The Cardinals' own calamitous period, meanwhile, appears to have only just begun. □



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A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

The Millennial generation, with its unprecedented digital savvy and ethnic, cultural and social diversity, is changing the face of sports in America. Just look at the fan next to you—and the sport on the field or on your phone

BY ALEXANDER WOLFF



★ Illustration by
Daniel Hertzberg

FLUSHING MEADOWS-CORONA

park, built on an old ash heap, illustrates a truth about ashes: The new has a way of rising from them. If you wandered through the largest stretch of parkland in Queens, New York City's most diverse borough, late last summer, you might have caught a glimpse of the future. Volleyball courts buzzed with Latinos playing the Ecuadorian game, with its high net and three to a side. The Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival went off by the Boathouse on Meadow Lake, and Chinese immigrants practiced tai chi at the Al Oerter Rec Center. Park police chased off a brace of West Indian immigrants trying to play cricket without a permit, a reminder of how the city has repurposed some lightly used baseball diamonds as cricket grounds. For every yarmulke you could find a hijab, and there was pickup soccer all over. Seventy-five and 50 years ago, respectively, World's Fairs took place right here; today this same patch of Queens again serves as a midway for the world.

Steps away, at CitiField, Mets second baseman Dilson Herrera began the Labor Day weekend sitting for a dugout interview with a reporter for the outlet *Phillies en Español*. Herrera ended the weekend by slapping a single through the infield to beat Philadelphia with his first big league RBI. The 20-year-old infielder was the youngest player in the majors and a native of Colombia, a minor headwater for the Latino talent flowing into the sport. He vowed to present the game-winning ball to his family back in Cartagena, but it would have been just as prized by members of the huge Colombian community within walking distance of the ballpark—not just in Flushing and Corona but also in Jackson Heights, home

CHANGING AMERICA

★★★

to the North American headquarters of Colombian TV network RCN, and in Elmhurst, one of the most ethnically variegated zip codes in the U.S.

Across a boardwalk from CitiField, at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, the U.S. Open junior boys' tournament hinted at how American men's tennis might pull out of its current swoon. Three U.S. teenagers sat in the Top 15 of the International Tennis Federation rankings. Stefan Kozlov emigrated from Macedonia and Michael Mmoh from Saudi Arabia. Francis Tiafoe was born in Maryland to refugees from Sierra Leone. Go further down the rankings and you could find Alex Rybakov and Dennis Uspensky—two American offspring



HERE, NOW

As its handball-court mural and park cricket games imply, Queens is a laboratory for American diversity.

MELDING POT

Many Latino Millennials—especially those who are soccer fans—see themselves as bicultural. TV execs and marketers have taken notice



FIVE TIMES SINCE 2001 the U.S. Men's National Soccer Team has beaten Mexico in a competitive match by the score of

2-0. After the match in September 2013, in Columbus, Ohio, U.S. fans made sure to rub the score in. Yet plenty of those chanting "*¡Dios a cero!*" that night weren't Anglos but second- and third-generation Mexican-Americans—bilingual, bicultural and, having just watched the country of their birth get the better of the land of their heritage, wholly pro-American. At least for the moment.

It's a striking example of why sports marketers now focus on the overlap between young fans and Latinos, especially Mexican-Americans, who are the largest Hispanic subgroup in the U.S. With the number of Latino Millennials booming, corporate Venn-diagram masters find in that audience the most saccharine of sweet spots. As a result, says Simon Wardle, chief strategy officer for the sports

and entertainment marketing firm Octagon Worldwide, "We might be approaching that perfect storm where soccer [in the U.S.] does emerge as the next big thing."

Latino Millennials helped boost TV ratings for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, which were up from '10 by 64% on Univision and 39% on ESPN. And Stateside audiences for English Premier League coverage on Telemundo and on NBC and its Spanish-language network NBC Universo more than doubled from the '12-13 season to '14-15. The flow of Hispanic and Latino stars to English soccer—Ángel Di María, Ander Herrera, Diego Costa, Cesc Fàbregas and Alexis Sánchez all made the move to Manchester United, Chelsea or Arsenal this season—helps explain why Premier League broadcasts are attracting more Latino Millennials, especially to Saturday-morning appointment viewing on NBC. "You play your game Friday night, wake up and watch with parents who played the sport themselves," says Wardle. "Family appointment viewing is what created the NFL juggernaut, and once you establish that, good things happen."

Soccer is already the second-most-popular participatory sport among 16-to-24-year-olds in the U.S., regardless of ethnicity. Meanwhile, Millennials make up the largest generational cohort in the country; one in five is Latino, and in that group almost a third are Mexican-Americans who follow or play the game. And they are strikingly integrated: According to a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center, second-generation Latinos are nearly twice as likely as

ANDREW SAVULICH/ANALYTICAL NEWS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (CRICKET); BENJAMIN NORMAN FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (KIDS)

of Russian émigrés—and Henrik Wierholm, who's just your average California-born Filipino-Norwegian-American.

As much as baseball and tennis and all the pickup sports in the park offered a snapshot in time, they foretold what is to be: the games we watch and play remade by a rapidly changing population. All around were the sounds of movement: the squeal of subway cars in the Willets Point switching yard, the roar of jets from LaGuardia Airport, the cries of seagulls as they wheeled over Flushing Bay. And in case anyone missed the point, two artists had hammered it home in Jackson Heights with a mural on an outdoor handball court off Northern Boulevard in which a subway train flies at you beneath the words QUEENS IS THE FUTURE.

America is barreling forward, and sports, so tightly braided into our national character and culture, are along for the

ride. Latinos accounted for more than half the population growth in the U.S. during the 2000s, and with an Asian population that's now growing even faster, the U.S. figures to become a "majority minority" country well before mid-century. But change won't follow from only the nation's ethnic makeup, which currently includes 46 million Americans born elsewhere and another 37 million born to those immigrants. The U.S. population is now composed of more members of the Millennial generation—adults and teens born since 1980—than of the baby boom generation. And as more and more Millennials come of age, their habits, attitudes and expectations will alter sports from the grass roots through the pros.

You can see the new normal in the Cambodian-American who plays high school football in Louisiana and in the Mexican who wrestles in California despite having to couch-surf through

high school because his parents have been deported. It's there in the Chinese-American kid who steps onto a playground with a newfound swagger he owes to Jeremy Lin; in Texas Friday-night lights illuminating stadiums filled with Mexican-American players and fans; in the football rosters at Ohio State and Penn State, mostly bereft of Eastern European immigrant surnames as manufacturing dies and population stagnates in the East and Midwest; and in Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany's moves to add Maryland and Rutgers to his conference, open an office in Manhattan and play the Big Ten's 2017 basketball tournament in Washington, D.C.—a three-card hedge as a growing, diverse population on the East Coast promises a more reliable supply of recruits and fans.

The new normal is there in the sports world's growing embrace of socially responsible practices, from diversity

AVERAGE U.S. VIEWERSHIP FOR FIFA WORLD CUP COVERAGE (IN MILLIONS)

YEAR	LOCATION	ESPN/ABC/ESPN2	UNIVISION
2014	Brazil	4.56	3.50
2010	South Africa	3.27	2.60
2006	Germany	2.32	2.10
2002	Japan/South Korea	1.04	.99
1998	France	1.22	1.30
1994	U.S.	2.80	1.40

SOURCE: SPORTSBUSINESS DAILY

their parents to say they speak English very or pretty well and to identify themselves as "typically American."

About a dozen years ago Univision began to refer to the U.S. Men's National Team as *El Equipo de Todos* (Everybody's Team). That formulation has helped turn Jurgen Klinsmann's men into an alternative for émigrés from all over Latin America: a second side deserving of the U.S.-based Latino fan's support after, or alongside, the team of one's ancestral homeland.

Anglos, especially older ones, might frown on such fungible loyalties. After he won a silver medal in the 1,500 meters at the London Olympics, U.S. runner Leo Manzano, the son of undocumented immigrants, was vilified in social media and by some columnists for tweeting that he was "representing two countries[,] USA and Mexico,"

and for carrying both flags during his victory lap. But Manzano's reaction was classically second-generation Latino, says Sonia Sroka, executive vice president in charge of multicultural marketing at the public relations firm Edelman. In Sroka's opinion, Manzano "lifted that Mexican flag because he had learned hard work and sacrifice from his parents. He had done something for them that they could never do in their own lives."

That complexity was captured by a series of McDonald's commercials called "House Divided," which aired around last summer's FIFA World Cup. A young Mexican-American man swings by his parents' house with his buddies, ready to cheer for the U.S. Men's National Team. Papi and his friends, decked out in green and white in support of El Tri, eye Junior and his posse warily and exile them to the garage. But everyone is under the same roof, and by the spot's end all are accommodated to both the origin and terminus of the family journey. Each cultural signifier is there: passion, family, tradition and, especially, loyalty.

Among Latino Millennials, that last word is key. "They see themselves as truly bicultural," says Bobby Jones, vice president of Octagon Access, which specializes in marketing to Millennial and multicultural audiences. "Whereas with previous generations there was a hard line—one culture or the other—Millennials are able to fluidly navigate [between the two]. There's a boldness and freedom in that, but at the same time, pride in that however they root, it's genuine." —A.W.

CHANGING AMERICA

initiatives to environmental programming, because marketing studies show that Millennials don't want to patronize businesses that stigmatize gays or teams that aren't good corporate citizens. It's

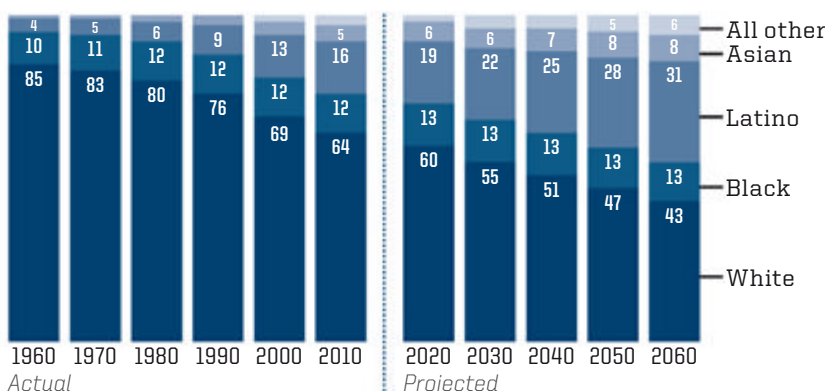
surveys from the Pew Research Center, help explain why Millennials are leading the conversion to soccer, a game once thought too alien to break through in the U.S. They want to see the best in the world play a sport that has been demystified for them, and the digital technology with which they've grown up permits them to do so across borders. When not gathering in big-city taverns on weekend mornings

Latinos. In 2007, alarmed by stagnant growth in the NBA's Latino fan base, Saskia Sorrosa, then the league's vice president of multicultural marketing, overhauled the league's approach. She ditched the "NBA en Español" banner, with its straight translations of team names (Toros for Bulls, Calor for Heat), which weren't resonating because U.S.-based Latino Millennials didn't speak that way. In its place she introduced a campaign called éne-bé-a: a phonetic rendering of NBA in Spanish. Some of the league's 31% growth in Latino engagement since then is tied in part to the success of franchises in Latino-rich markets such as Miami and San Antonio. But the knowing, almost tongue-in-cheek quality of the gesture counts for enough that the NBA sold out its ÉNE-BÉ-A T-shirts within a week. "On the website, if they read the story, it's in Spanish," Sorrosa says. "If they watch the video clip, it's in English. It's cultural and generational. They like that nod, some indication that you're trying to connect with them."

Even as most U.S.-based Latino viewers of ESPN watched the network's English-language channels, an "*Esto es SportsCenter*" promo featuring Robinson Cano sent a similar message of outreach and inclusion. So did ESPN's decision to assign announcers such as Jorge Ramos and Alejandro Moreno to English-language broadcasts involving Latin American teams during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Their accents and enthusiasm were features, not bugs, and not just to bicultural Latinos. When even Anglo Millennials partake of something from another culture, whether it's food, music or sports, "they want the most authentic thing they can find that's still palatable," says Bobby Jones, who runs Octagon Worldwide's Access Group, which markets to Millennial and multicultural audiences. "And [Ramos and Moreno] are a more authentic version than if Brent Musburger were trying to announce soccer."

THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA 1960-2060

% of the total population



SOURCE: THE NEXT AMERICA BY PAUL TAYLOR AND THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER

there in the consumption of the Olympics as a pan-national festival of striving, in which young Americans follow Usain Bolt on Twitter and cheer for him without a care that they don't share his citizenship.

The new normal is there in the soccer loyalties of countless Chicano families now split generationally between El Tri and the U.S. Men's National Team. And it's there in network boardrooms, where executives are making huge bets on soccer: The U.S. Spanish-language rights to the next two FIFA World Cups went to Tele-mundo for \$600 million—\$200 million more than Fox ponied up for the same rights in English.

So many Millennials claim a multi-ethnic background that they tend to be comfortable with an increasingly nonwhite America. And given the times in which they've come of age, they are increasingly free of cold-war-era attachment to American exceptionalism. Factors such as these, among many trends detailed in the latest

for live telecasts, they catch the English Premier League or La Liga or the Champions' League on smartphones or tablets. They're different from their parents, who in the 1960s and '70s grew up on sports-page tastemakers such as New York *Daily News* columnist Dick Young, who derided soccer players as "Commie pansies."

If he were still alive, Young wouldn't know what to make of the lengths to which sports marketers now go to reach



BANNER TEAM

From left: Tiago Splitter, Manu Ginóbili, Boris Diaw and Patty Mills are the Spurs' foreign legion.



AMERICAN DREAMERS

The success of an Omaha high school soccer team inspired legislators to rewrite state law



FIVE YEARS AGO, as Omaha South High soccer player Manny Lira lined up his penalty kick, he could make out one

voice in the chorus of jeers raining down from the stands. It belonged to a heckler who yelled, "Speak English!"

When Lira's spot kick found the back of the net, sending the Packers to their first state final, the cries suddenly came from Lira, his ecstatic teammates and their fans. "That's definitely the best weapon to use against someone who's talking about you," says Lira, whose family emigrated from Mexico in 1999.

Once upon a time Italians, Poles, Germans, Lithuanians and Croats turned Omaha's south side into the meat-producing capital of the world and lent the local high school its nickname. But by the end of the 1990s the stockyards had closed, and today many of the families of the South High soccer players—with immigrant parents from not only Mexico but also Central America, Southeast Asia and Africa—live in the housing stock abandoned by those Europeans and work in the lone meatpacking plant, a few blocks from the school. "Just drive down South 24th Street," says coach Joe Maass, whose roots in the neighborhood go back three generations. "You'll see international bakeries, different kinds of ice cream,

NEXT WAVE

The new residents of a changing Omaha rallied to support a "campaign for immigrants."



Mexican grocery stores—most of the businesses are Latino-owned now."

While playing at nearby Bryan High during the early 1990s, Maass routinely scored hat tricks against South's doormat soccer team. The Packers continued to finish below .500 after he became their coach in 1999. But in 2007 they broke through, going 16-2. The source of their progress was discernible in the way they broke

huddles: "*Uno, dos, tres, South!*"

In 2010, after Lira buried that spot kick, South met an elite soccer program, Lincoln East High, in the title game. The Packers lost 4-2 in extra time, and as they accepted their silver medals, a Lincoln East fan littered the field with green cardboard rectangles—"green cards." Lincoln East administrators and students sent South High a notebook filled with apologies, and some parents donated money to South's soccer program.

After falling short of a championship the next two seasons, the Packers in 2013 outscored opponents 133-3. In the title game, which drew a record 8,200 spectators—more than that year's Class A football final—they beat Omaha's Creighton Prep 1-0 to cap a 23-0 season and earn the top spot in a national poll. The school once known for producing former Nebraska All-America center Dave Rimington and modern pro football's first black starting quarterback, Marlin Briscoe, now sends first-generation Americans to college on soccer scholarships.

Two weeks after that championship, then governor Dave Heineman, who opposed state support for undocumented immigrants, received the Packers at his residence in Lincoln. Afterward senior goalkeeper Sayeg Moreno wrote and sent Heineman an unsigned open letter on behalf of the team, asking the governor to change policies that, as the letter put it, "make it look like we are good enough to die in war for your rights, wash your dishes and mow your lawn, but we are not good enough to drive on your roads, to go to work and to class."

By the time Heineman was succeeded by Pete Ricketts in January, Nebraska was the only U.S. state where so-called Dreamers—undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. before they were 16—couldn't apply for a driver's license, student aid or a work permit. "It was personal to all of us," says Moreno, who was eight when his undocumented parents brought him to the U.S. and who's now in college. The Nebraska legislature voted to change the law last month and overrode a veto by Ricketts.

Success in sports has brought new life to South High, a magnet school focused on bilingual education and the arts. Enrollment is up 25% over the past decade. "Nobody used to care about any sport here," says Maass. "Our basketball team got good. Our boys' and girls' cross-country teams are ranked. The community's buying into the school, and it started with soccer."

—John Schreier

Efforts to reach Latino fans can sometimes be ham-handed. The UFC markets Mexican-American heavyweight Cain Velasquez as a symbol of “brown pride,” after a tattoo he wears reading exactly that. But campaigns that don’t differentiate between Mexican and Cuban heritage, or Dominican and Argentine, presume that Latinos are some sort of

monolith. They’re not. Smart marketers can slice and dice the demographic, telling the acculturated from the nonacculturated and the bicultural from the first-generation.

Soccer and mixed martial arts enjoy passionate Latino followings, and Major League Baseball should, too, as it pours millions into developing Latino talent. But the sport isn’t refreshing its gray-

ing fan base with young Latinos at a replacement rate. Conventional wisdom also holds that the game is too slow for a digital generation that likes its sports briskly paced and quick-cutting. But Millennial habits may contain the seeds to baseball’s resurgence. The sport has been a pioneer in adding Wi-Fi to its ballparks and Spanish platforms to its websites. With the game’s built-in lulls and culture of statistics, banter and argument, it’s well-adapted to both the fan at the ballpark with a smartphone and to the TV viewer at home eager for a “second-screen

NO PASSING FANCY

It took a while, but the WNBA is finally acting on the knowledge that many of its fans are lesbians



FOR MOST OF its first 17 seasons the WNBA took an ambivalent stance toward its significant lesbian fan base.

Individual teams staged the occasional Gay Pride Night, but even in 2009 a Washington Mystics executive told *The Washington Post* that the Verizon Center Kiss Cam didn’t go live at Mystics games because “we don’t find it appropriate.” So last May, when the league and Cover Girl cosmetics announced WNBA Pride, a nationwide campaign to embrace LGBT fans, it was hard not to wonder what had taken the league so long. First Jason Collins became the NBA’s first openly gay player; later Michael Sam came out and was drafted by the NFL; and finally Major League Baseball honored the late, closeted high-five pioneer Glenn Burke. Only then—a year after its most dominant young star, Brittney Griner, came out—did the WNBA fly the rainbow flag. Was the league drafting in the slipstream of men’s pro sports?

Not at all, says WNBA president Laurel Richie: “The LGBT community has been with us since our inception. Players have been grand marshals of [gay pride] parades, and we’ve had online campaigns with Logo TV and AfterEllen.com for five or six years now. This is really



STAR POWER

The league’s new LGBT sales effort centers on players like Seimone Augustus of the Lynx.



a push from its players—not just gay ones, which some estimates place at 40%, but also straight players who have joined the “ally” movement. (Athlete Ally is one of WNBA Pride’s supporting partners.) Even if the initiative seems late, the WNBA is the first pro sports league with an integrated marketing campaign aimed at gays and lesbians.

Shortly after the WNBA unveiled its Pride platform, Richie went to Tulsa for a Shock game, and a woman in the stands told her, “As soon as I heard, I got in my car and drove to the game.” Richie nodded, bemused; virtually every fan there had driven. But the woman quickly made clear how she was different: “I’m from Nebraska!” —A.W.

about bringing it all together.”

Rick Welts, who helped develop the WNBA as a marketing executive in the mid-1990s, recalls that when attendance stagnated after the first few seasons, “we realized lesbians were an important segment of our fan base, and we had very sincere conversations with our operators.” Those conversations led to new marketing approaches, such as ads for the Minnesota Lynx in a gay publication, visits to West Hollywood’s Girl Bar by Los Angeles Sparks players, and an auction for a date with Seattle Storm star Lauren Jackson at a “Girl For Girl” fund-raiser. “The league [now] putting its umbrella over it,” says Welts, who is gay and is now president of the Golden State Warriors, “speaks to rapid change in our society.”

At a game last July a gay Storm season-ticket holder, retired teacher and administrator Lin Zurfluh, said she suspected the league had gotten



experience.” Young Latinos are even more likely than their Anglo counterparts to have a mobile Internet connection, and the Florida Marlins spend half their marketing budget reaching out to the ethnic market (with its substantial population of baseball-oriented Cuban-Americans). For the Marlins, as senior VP Sean Flynn puts it, “Every day is Hispanic Heritage Day.”

Indeed, the Millennial generation hasn’t had to go to the trouble of adapting to digital technology, because its members haven’t known anything else. Fans under 35 are changing sports media with the content they create: tweets, blog posts and Facebook updates. (Some websites essentially expropriate, aggregate and monetize it.) Pew reports that Millennials are also strikingly tolerant. That won’t just influence the sports that they and their kids follow and play; it’ll also prod the world of sports to make more radical changes than its stodgy nature would ordinarily permit.

The widespread backlash against the NCAA and its regulations syncs up with Millennials’ evident enshrinement of personal freedom, distrust of institutions and reluctance to be forced into what they see as false or hidebound choices. The 2014 NBA champion San Antonio Spurs might be the perfect expression of the Millennial ethic. “They didn’t stand for assimilation but celebration of ‘We’re better because we’re all different,’ ” says Octagon’s Jones. “Seven out of 10 Millennials say they float in and out of different groups and cliques, and the Spurs embodied the whole idea of *and* over *or*—I can be a proud Argentine or Frenchman or Australian and a great Spur.”

Meanwhile, the gay-rights revolution wouldn’t have gained its recent foothold in sports if not for the attitudes of Millennials, who are at the center of The Athlete Ally movement in solidarity with LGBT rights. After he came out in 2011, when he was president of the Phoenix Suns, Rick Welts notes, his teenage niece couldn’t wait to get on the phone and share the news with her friends. “Her coolness factor shot up by a factor of 10,” says Welts. “That was a wake-up to me, that kids don’t look at these issues the same way—that it’s an irreversible trend.”

One irreversible trend, it’s safe to say, among many. □



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+ NO FILLERS OR BY-PRODUCTS
+ NO ARTIFICIAL INGREDIENTS
YES!



It's Yes Food. It's Oscar Mayer.



High Tech, New Lows

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

WHEN I WAS growing up in the 1980s, voting for the baseball All-Star Game was simple. You picked up a paper ballot at the ballpark, you punched out the holes to vote for your favorite players, and you were confident that every vote was counted properly because Florida was not involved.

There was no technology in baseball, and that was fine. An iPhone just would have gotten between a ballplayer and the body parts he wanted to scratch. But now you can vote for All-Star starters online—up to 35 times. Thirty-five times! Who came up with the idea to let everybody vote 35 times, and when does he run for mayor of Chicago?

You could cast multiple votes with paper, too, but at some point you would run out of ballots or patience. An online system is ripe for corruption. I grew suspicious when I saw that with 10 days left in fan balloting, the American League's nine projected starters were eight Royals and Sepp Blatter.

Actually, the only non-Kansas City players leading at their positions were Angels centerfielder Mike Trout and Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera. Royals fans insist this is all fair game. They spent a long time in baseball's wilderness—the low point came when the 2005 team was mathematically eliminated in August of 2004. Now they are just excited about their team, and they are all voting exactly 35 times. But it is fair to wonder if there is a little technological hanky-panky going on, and speaking of technological hanky-panky, let's join Pablo Sandoval on the toilet.

Surely you've heard: The Boston third baseman was benched recently for clicking "like" on an Instagram photo while he was in the bathroom during a game. Apparently the Red Sox wanted him to focus on the action at hand, or if that wasn't enough, on the game.

Meanwhile, the government is investigating the Cardinals for breaking into the Astros' computers. Here at the Society for No American Baseball Research, we believe this is Houston's fault for having computers. We prefer old-time scouting methods: Rate every player's ability to throw, catch, run, hit and look "strapping." You say "PITCHf/x" and we giggle because it sounds dirty.

Imagine a baseball world without technology. Sure, we would all

Personally,
I grew
suspicious
of fan
balloting
when I saw
that the
American
League's
nine
projected
starters
were eight
Royals
and
Sepp
Blatter.


How should
MLB handle
the all-Royals
All-Star vote?

Join the
discussion on
Twitter by
using
#SIPointAfter
and following
@Rosenberg_Mike

be a lot dumber. But tell me: What's wrong with being dumb? Use small words, please.

Really, now: As much as you like watching games in high definition, wasn't your viewing experience more peaceful in low definition? You couldn't really tell if a ball was fair or foul, if a pitch was a strike or a ball, or even which teams were playing. You just knew you loved America.

Players weren't distracted by pictures of attractive women on their phones, which allowed them to concentrate on attractive women in the stands. They then focused on beating the best pitcher in the game, meaning the one with the most wins, which isn't really a good stat, but we didn't know that at the time and we liked it, O.K.?

Alas, there is no turning back. We can't return all the computers and smartphones we bought in the last 25 years, because who can remember where we put the receipts? We have technology, we have advanced stats, we have video of what makes players great . . . and still, we have an AL All-Star team that looks like it was put together by an eight-year-old in Overland Park.

You must admit that's some way-above-replacement-level irony right there. Imagine this sequence of events: The Royals release Omar Infante—who leads the balloting at second base despite being the worst hitter in the AL—but he ends up as an All-Star starter anyway. On July 14 he steps into the box at Cincinnati's Great American Ballpark in a blank uniform. He bats once, with the bases loaded, and strikes out. The AL loses the game (and home field advantage in the World Series) by one run. Three months later, thanks in part to the passion of their own fans, the Royals have to play Game 7 of the World Series on the road.

What would we do then? As always, I have no idea. But I'm open to hearing any of the Astros' suggestions, which is why I'm calling the Cardinals. □



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